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THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

SEVERN EDITION

THE WORKS OF
FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

UNDERGROWTH
(with E. Brett Young)

DEEP SEA

THE DARK TOWER

IRON AGE

THE CRESCENT MOON

THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN

THE TRAGIC BRIDE

THE BLACK DIAMOND

THE RED KNIGHT

PILGRIM'S REST

WOODSMOKE

COLD HARBOUR

SEA HORSES

PORTRAIT OF CLARE

MY BROTHER JONATHAN

BLACK ROSES

JIM REDLAKE

MR. AND MRS. PENNINGTON

THE HOUSE UNDER THE WATER

THIS LITTLE WORLD

WHY WE LIVE

FAR FROM

THEY SEEK A COUNTRY

DR. BRADLEY REMEMBERS

THE CITY OF GOLD

MR. LUCTON'S FREEDOM

A MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE

THE ISLAND

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

DR.
BRADLEY
REMEMBERS



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
MELBOURNE :: LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED AUGUST 1938
REPRINTED AUGUST, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER 1938
MARCH 1939
FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE SEVERN EDITION 1940
REPRINTED 1950

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

To
The Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George, O.M.
whose Invalidity Insurance Act
gave greater dignity and security
to the
General Practitioner
in 1913

PREFACE

THE book which eventually became *Dr. Bradley Remembers* was planned in 1919 as a sequel to *The Young Physician*. At that time the project was deferred for a number of reasons (which included *The Young Physician's* lack of any welcome from the press or the public), my own growing infatuation with the African scene, a deep-seated suspicion that the central figure of the earlier book was a character too slender and too indefinite to sustain the role I had allotted to him in the later, and, finally, a reasonable distrust of my own powers at that period of doing justice to a theme for which nothing less than the best I could give would have satisfied me. In all my earlier novels there had been doctors of one kind or another; and this, indeed, had been natural; for in addition to having studied and practised medicine myself I was the latest representative of a family which had been directly associated with the Birmingham Medical School for three generations and had been born, as it were, with the smell of the dispensary in my nostrils and bred among "Scenes from Medical Life." And now, after what I deemed to be the failure of *The Young Physician* and the limited scope of *My Brother Jonathan* in presenting my vision of the doctor's life, I determined to dismiss

the earlier book as a fragment, and the later as a study of character not strictly medical, and to embark on a full length portrait of a General Practitioner—the kind of doctor who, to my mind, was most representative of the noble calling I had forsaken, giving the new book its place in the ambitious scheme of the Mercian novels which had engrossed me after my first attack of African fever.

Though *Dr. Bradley* owes next to nothing to my own experience, which was all post-Listerian, it does owe a good deal to what I heard in my childhood from my grandfather (the Dr. Weston of *Jim Redlake*), my father (whose life corresponded more or less in time with John Bradley's) and from my medical uncle and great-uncle, all of whom practised during the Listerian revolution. The events of Dr. Bradley's romantic childhood and the subsidiary characters of the book (including Dr. Mortimore) are completely imaginary; and so, for that matter, is the Black Country village of Sedgebury in which he spent his long life.

When the book was published, a number of critics leapt to the conclusion that it was in the nature of a "reply" to another novel of medical life which had recently acquired a good deal of notoriety but which I had not read. Needless to say, it was nothing of the sort. If it appeared to insist on the essential nobility of the doctor's calling, the general honesty of the profession and the slenderness of its material rewards, this

was no more than an expression of my own conviction that (as Stevenson declared) the doctor is "the fine flower of our civilization", and that no more honourable or conscientious man than the average British general practitioner exists on this earth. I have never yet written a "novel with a purpose", and yet, none the less, I have never written a novel that was not, in a sense, an Act of Faith. *Dr. Bradley Remembers* is the tribute of a renegade to the idealism of a profession he has deserted but which he still reveres.

I dedicated the book to Mr. Lloyd George not merely as an acknowledgment of a personal friendship which I count as a privilege of peculiar richness but also because I have always regarded his great social measure, the Insurance Act of 1913, as the most signal contribution that has ever been made to the security and dignity of the General Practitioner of Medicine.

CHAPTER ONE

(I)

BETWEEN six and eight on Friday, October the thirty-first, the day appointed for his handing over his practice to the young man who had bought it, Dr. Bradley "took" his evening surgery as usual and for the last time. At six o'clock precisely, shod in the carpet slippers that were so familiar a relief to his feet which had probably tramped no less than ten miles during the last eight hours, he shuffled through the short passage, no wider than a liner's alleyway, which united the house—at the junction of Halesby Road and Crabb's Lane—in which he lived, to the surgery itself.

This was a small one-storeyed annexe, consisting of two major compartments. The outer, directly approached from Crabb's Lane by a strip of blue bricks on whose criss-cross ridges three generations of his patients had politely scraped away the gritty Black-country mud or stamped off the cindery snow, was completely separated from the next by a wall of plastered lath with a door in the middle. The inner half of the building was sub-divided unequally by a partition of beery varnished deal, five feet high, surmounted by

an irregular *chevaux de frise* of bottle-necks, and economically designed not to deaden sound and assure the privacy of medical consultations, which have much in common with those of the confessional, but merely to lend a sacramental air to the process of concocting medicines, which should be almost as secret, and to support a dispensing counter and a half a dozen drug-laden shelves.

Beyond this partition—so low that, even when he was dispensing, the crown of Dr. Bradley's bald scalp draped with wispy white hair could be seen moving to and fro mysteriously illuminated by the play of colours cast on it from the stock-bottles' rainbow contents—lay an elongated chamber which the direct light of day never penetrated: an arcanum perpetually dim (save when the single, disintegrating incandescent mantle glowed white) and haunted by the melancholy music of a leaking tap from which water dripped persistently into a sink whose lining had once been of white glazed porcelain but now, streaked by acids and blotched with medicaments and eaten away at last by the tap's dripping torture, suggested uses less sanitary than those it fulfilled. Against this visual impression the doubtful observer was happily reassured by the composite odour with which the dispensary's air was drenched. Subtly different from that which pervades a chemist's shop with its vitiating hints of perfumes and soaps and cosmetics, the air of Dr. Bradley's dispensary possessed a tang of its own. Unmistakable,

unforgettable, to those who have breathed it, it was the essence of General Practice, the smell diffused by innumerable floating molecules; aromatic oils—orange, cardamons, lavender, pepper-mint; spirituous wafts of absolute alcohol, choking ether, heavy-sweet chloroform; pungent whiffs of ergot and sour valerian, of hot acids, flat alkalis—the whole body of medicinal odours upheld and suspended, as it were, in an air already cleansed and purified by strong antiseptics. This composite odour saturated Dr. Bradley's clothes and clung to his person. It was just as well, perhaps, that the dispensary partition was low and that it was also permitted to escape and to combat and overcome those all-too-human emanations of working clothes and soiled bandages which—particularly when nights were damp and the benches were crowded—emerged from the waiting-room and filled the consulting-room.

This, the central point of Dr. Bradley's existence, was a small room, fifteen feet square, more or less adequately lighted by day by opposite windows glazed with frosted glass, and at night by a central incandescent pendant. The floor was covered with brown linoleum, worn thin in the track that led from the waiting-room door to the patient's chair and beneath the pedestal desk behind which the doctor sat. The windows were both uncurtained. Apart from the desk, and two horsehair-seated chairs of Victorian mahogany, one behind and one in front of it, the room was sparsely furnished. Beneath one of the windows

stretched a long, flat couch, upholstered in purplish American leather, worn through at the corners. In front of the other stood a deal table, its top covered with the same threadbare material in marbled white. On this were disposed a tarnished microscope, a rack of test-tubes, not all of which were empty; a spirit-heated steriliser from whose surface the plating had peeled, and a number of plush-lined cases containing surgical instruments. On the floor beneath it rested a shabby midwifery-bag of leather that had once been black, and a greyish pile of back numbers of the *British Medical Journal*, which appeared to have accumulated there like silt or driven leaves. On the left of the door that led from the draughty waiting-room, stood a mid-nineteenth-century mahogany bookcase; but only one of the shelves behind the glass doors of the upper part of this massive piece of furniture, and that the uppermost of the four, was filled with books, and the books themselves, though shabby and tattered with use, bespoke no fierce scientific curiosity nor desire to "keep up" with the times, being, most of them, merely the usual student textbooks—such as Quain's *Elements of Anatomy*—in editions whose date corresponded with that of the bookshelf itself. The full length of the lowest shelf was occupied by a set of bulky ledgers with spines of red leather; the two next above it were crammed with packets of web-bandages of various sizes carelessly opened, spools and sheets of adhesive plaster, rolls of lint and absorbent wool and surgical

gauze, all commingled with lengths of wooden splinting for fractures.

If there was any order or method in the disposal of this dump of surgical paraphernalia it was not easily discovered, and a similar though even more evident confusion concealed the ink-splashed top of the desk which occupied the centre of the room. In the midst of it a massive but tarnished silver inkstand, with an inscription recording the occasion of its presentation, emerged from a drift of litter: unopened circulars and blotters advertising proprietary drugs; memoranda hurriedly scribbled on the backs of envelopes, books of blank certificates and bill-heads, with, here and there, the brighter colouring of an un-presented cheque; a pair of empty cases, one for pince-nez and one for spectacles, two stethoscopes—one of the old-fashioned kind shaped like a wooden trumpet, the other a tarnished binaural with rubber tubes—while full in the middle of the desk, in odd contradiction to this littered accumulation, lay an open ledger with the day's date inscribed with flourishes at the top of the page and beneath it, written in an old-fashioned script as clear and finished as copperplate, a precise and orderly record of the morning's work.

The contrast of this written page, whose spacing and choice calligraphy made it a work of art, with its surroundings, which seemed not merely shabby but slovenly, presented a problem not easily solved. What sort of man could this be, the casual observer might

ask himself, who was, it appeared, content to exist in surroundings of discomfort and disorder that were almost squalid, who was so neglectful of material things that he did not even trouble to present the cheques that were paid to him, yet took pains and pride in recording the services by which they were earned in this exquisite, meticulous hand? How could the writer of such a page consent to conduct his business in conditions which surely made it a labour to find a single thing that he wanted?

The answer to these bewildered questions lay, perhaps, in the patience the day-book's page displayed. There was nothing, in fact, in that room, on which, given time, its owner could not lay his hand. He was a creature of fixed habits, by his very nature incapable of hurrying. His life was not without method, but the method was his own. Within the narrow compass of that consulting-room and dispensary, in which he had lived and moved (but never impatiently) for the best part of fifty years, there were gathered and compressed, somewhere or other, all the implements and materials necessary to his trade. They fitted his life as sufficiently and as snugly as a snail-shell fits a snail. Their very contradictions were symbolical and appropriate, having their counterpart in the nature and person of Dr. Bradley himself.

(II)

The hands of the round-faced clock on the wall above the waiting-room door were in line and pointed to six precisely as Dr. Bradley entered the surgery that evening, the last of his professional career. The passage from which he emerged was pitch-dark; the consulting-room dim with the suggestion of sub-aqueous light that the corner street-lamp cast obliquely on one sooty window and, in mid-air, the glimmer of the by-pass jet within its opaline globe. In that passage, as in this room and in the house itself, Dr. Bradley found it easy to move by instinct rather than by sight. By habit and use their shapes and the position and forms of their contents had become as familiar to his subconscious mind as those of his own limbs. There was no corner of the building from attic to cellar into which he could not have found his way blindfold, without thought or hesitation. When the night-bell roused him, he never troubled to light his bedside candle: he shuffled down the steep stairs in the dark to the door; his hand slid back the latch without groping or fumbling. There was no ridge in the floor-boards, no variation in the texture of the unevenly-worn linoleum, to which his muscular sense was not prepared to adjust itself automatically. Now, avoiding the patient's chair, which stood in his way, with the sixth sense of a somnambulist, he reached up his

hand to the hanging lamp and pulled the by-pass chain.

The mantle glowed yellow, then whitened. The shabby consulting-room awoke to the crude light of its incandescence. As he moved from beneath the lamp to his seat at the desk it illuminated Dr. Bradley's figure with unflattering impartiality from the wispy hair on his head to his carpet-slippers. He was a tall old man who must once have been powerfully built, though the stoop of his shoulders and his slippered shambling gait made him seem of middle height. The shrinkage which had reduced his stature had affected his body in other dimensions. His trousers bagged at the knees and lay wrinkled like a concertina below them. His waistcoat and coat appeared to be draped or hung from his broad shoulders rather than fitted to him; but it was the nature of this clothing rather than its fit that made his shrunken figure remarkable. The shapeless trousers were of striped cashmere, of a grey too light to be serviceable; the coat, a frock-coat with ample-skirtings and corded silk revers; the waistcoat, from the watch-pocket of which a fob with a signet dangled, was of striped brocade, cut high; the white linen collar glazed with starch—so tall at the back that a fringe of white hair hung over it, and open at the front on either side of a prominent Adam's apple above a necktie of white piqué, its knot held in place by a cameo-brooch.

The formality of these garments, so out of keeping not only with the carpet-slippers (now happily hidden

on a mat of similar material beneath the desk) but also with the highly informal and threadbare character of their wearer's surroundings, gave an immediate impression of theatrical eccentricity. No man, one would say, had any business to be wearing such clothes in these days and in such a place. They were rather, in fact, a sign of complete unselfconsciousness. Apart from the slippers, a concession to elderly comfort, they were the uniform a professional man had been expected to wear in the year eighteen eighty-seven, when Dr. Bradley had qualified. Fifty years ago he had accepted them as a matter of routine, and, having no pride in clothes as an ornament nor interest in them save in that passion for cleanliness which still showed itself in the spotlessness of his linen and white necktie, it had never occurred to him, since those days to wear any other. The sort of clothes in which Lister had operated were suitable for his disciple; though, in the late nineties, when he first took to tricycling on his round, Dr. Bradley had exchanged the silk hat in which he started (and which was now shrouded in crape and only worn at funerals) for a felt of the same height with a rounded edge at the crown, and had gathered in the slack of the trouser-bottoms with steel-spring ankle-clips which in hours of abstraction he often forgot to remove. Strangers, perhaps, found this outmoded get-up grotesque and had been known to stare and smile; but to Sedgebury folk, it had been so familiar for years as not to appear remarkable. The

dwindling numbers of his own generation were pleased to be reminded by it of the days of their youth; their children and grandchildren, who had never seen Dr. Bradley wear anything else since they goggled at him from their mother's arms, accepted it as a natural, distinctive phenomenon of coloration and shape. To them he was just "the doctor," or, less reverently, "the old boy." In his case, indeed, the clothes were the man, and the man was beloved.

Dr. Bradley leant back in his chair and stretched out his legs beneath the desk, as though his knees were aching. His left hand moved unerringly, automatically, to the long spectacle-case. He took from it the steel-rimmed spectacles whose ends were tipped with red sealing-wax and set them half-way down the bridge of his bony nose, so that when he wanted the lenses he need lift them no more than an inch. Next he picked up the binaural stethoscope and slipped the twin ear-pieces round his neck, so that the rubber tubes dangled in front of his chest like an order of chivalry or a Lord Mayor's chain. The hands which performed these movements provided an immediate contrast to the sloven lines of his ill-fitting clothes. They were large hands—too large indeed for the bony wrists that issued from the starched shirt-cuffs, but in keeping with the doctor's broad shoulders and his stature. They were an old man's hands: beneath the skin, which had lost its elasticity, a tormented network of veins stood out like dead ivy on a smooth beech-trunk. Their knuckles

and finger-joints were thickened with rheumatism. Yet the first impression they gave was one of strength rather than of clumsiness. They appeared not merely strong but capable: they looked like hands that had always been—and still were—employed in movements of precision and delicacy. Examining them, one could be no longer surprised by the exquisite craft of the day-book's copperplate page. And, above all, beneath that thin glaze which continued scrubbing with antiseptics gives to the skin, those large hands were clean to their well-trimmed nails and sensitive finger-tips with a passionate, surgical cleanness. One might feel safe in such hands. To be "in good hands" is the phrase.

Indeed, if men's faces betray aught of their natures, one might feel safe with the rest of him. Dr. Bradley's clean-shaven face was heavily boned like his limbs. The nose on which he had ledged his spectacles was prominent; his chin firm, his orbits heavily shadowed by bushy eyebrows which—unlike his sparse hair, which was white—were iron-grey. Though in youth, or in the prime of life, well-bearded and whiskered, it might well have suggested a certain craggy virility, it was not a handsome face. Its modelling was too perfunctory; the mouth and nose were too large, the eyes too deep-set, the brow too low, the cheek-bones too prominent. Yet old age, which had bent his body, had dealt with these features more kindly. The retreat of the hair from his forehead had heightened his brow and given it a nobility which

it must have lacked. The shaving of beard and whiskers had rid the face of what must once have seemed a truculent air, revealing beneath them the cheeks whose deeply-furrowed wrinkles told of anxiety and, one guessed, of pain. The mouth, too, though similar stresses had wrinkled it, showed no trace of bitterness. Its thin, bluish, old man's lips were composed in that kindly serenity which comes from the detachment of age: that sublime remoteness which, without loss of sympathy, has come to acknowledge the eventual unimportance of human vicissitude, and lends to the faces of the old—above all to their mouths and eyes—an air of dispassionate benevolence which is one of the highest gifts of wisdom. It was a wise face, one would say—not clever (as were his hands) but shrewd and lively. It was also, for all its obvious tokens of age, oddly young, oddly innocent. The skin of his cheeks between their deep folds and furrows had the fresh hues of youth; his blue eyes, more vivid from the whiteness of his hair, were not dimmed and were capable of sudden brightening. His shrunken lips could still smile. He smiled often, indeed, to himself; and people who saw him found this puzzling and rather pitiful. It seemed rather shocking for a man who had so few years in front of him to find life amusing or whimsical. Perhaps, like a baby in its cradle, he smiled at nothing. A sinister sign: the doctor was "failing," they said. When a man reached this stage of childishness he might easily make mistakes.

If he had guessed their thoughts, Dr. Bradley would have laughed out loud.

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(III)

He was smiling to himself when, emerging from a brief period of abstraction, he perceived that the fingers of the clock now pointed to five minutes past six and brought down the palm of his hand on the bell that stood on the desk. The door of the waiting-room opened. The evening "surgery" began.

There were more patients that evening than usually presented themselves on a Friday evening. Friday morning, when all the panel patients' certificates must be signed for them to draw their sick-pay, was the busiest of the week. But October is a treacherous month to those who live in the Black Country. Its fogs bring with them the seeds of winter maladies and a lowering of spirits that awakens old pains forgotten as long as the sun of Luke's summer is shining. The waiting-room was packed like a sheep-shearing pen. Each time the door opened it admitted a new patient, presented a new problem. They were nearly all working-class people: no reasonable human being would choose to live in Sedgely unless he were forced to earn his living there or had been born there and knew no better. The greater part were women, many of whom carried babies slung in their shawls,

having nowhere to leave them. Not many of them were gravely ill, though the thought of the difference between three and six for a visit and two shillings for a mere consultation had brought a few to the surgery who should have been in bed. Dr. Bradley was quick to spot these. When he scolded them for their folly he did not mince his words. He rated them fiercely at first; but when he had had his say his tone changed. He knew what the difference of eighteen pence meant to their anxious minds, though often enough the difference was theoretical and the sum, small or large, unlikely ever to be paid. Then he said:

"Come along now. You know what I think of you. Keep this thermometer under your tongue, and don't bite it through, or you'll have to pay for it. Let's feel your pulse. H'm . . . now come over here and lie down: I must run over your chest. Put the baby down on the floor: it won't hurt."

He made the woman lie down on the threadbare couch and watched her shaky fingers fumbling with bodice-buttons, revealing a grubby chemise, woven combinations and a strip of flannel soaked in camphorated oil. As he watched her, his face, which had first been angry (though the violence was often assumed for their benefit) and then brusquely kind for fear that he had scared her too much, became set with a quiet intensity. It no longer showed any emotion, genuine or feigned; it was that of a workman engaged on his proper task. The woman whose

folly he had rated, whose distress at his angry outburst he had hastened to disarm with a smile, was no longer a person but a patient, a mere aggregation of living organs and tissues into the state of which it was his business to enquire. There was a ruthlessness in the fine old hands that percussed and palpated, lingering here and there in the process when sound or sensation seemed to diverge from the normal.

"Say ninety-nine," he said. "Not like that! don't whisper it: your voice is all right. Ninety-nine! That's better. Go on till I tell you to stop. Now let's have a go at your back. Slip these blessed things down and turn over on your face and breathe deeply. I don't mind if it does make you cough. That's all the better. And don't worry about the baby: crying won't hurt him. Let him cry. If you pick them up every time they give tongue they soon get to know you're a fool and worry the life out of you. You may learn that some day—but I don't suppose you will. H'm. . . . Yes . . . yes. That'll do. Now dress up again before you get pneumonia. It isn't your fault you haven't caught it already. Got a bottle? No? Very well."

He detached the stethoscope tubes from his ears and slipped them round his neck again, shambling off towards the dispensary. From behind the partition there issued the sound of shuffling feet, the clink of glass stoppers, the spurt of a tap. In a moment he emerged with a bottle of medicine in his hands. It was wrapped in snow-white paper sealed with wax. The neat

wrapping showed his passionate pride in detail. The young men turned out from the schools to-day with their fancy degrees couldn't wrap up a bottle like that. The woman was sitting rocking her baby and suckling it through her open bodice beneath her shawl. She looked timid and humble. Her face was flushed; she breathed quickly.

"I'm sorry I didn't come up before, sir," she said. "But you know what it is, what with one thing and another . . ."

"You'd no business to come here at all. Get home and go straight to bed and mind you stay there. Take this physic every four hours: it'll cut the phlegm. And remember this: don't you dare to get out of bed before I come round to see you to-morrow morning—no popping downstairs in the cold to put up your husband's breakfast before he goes to work."

"George won't be agoing to work, doctor. He's on the dole."

"All the better. He'll be able to look after you. It'll do him good for a change."

"Yes, doctor. And what'll this be, doctor, please?"

"What'll what be?"

"The charge for this here physic." Clutching the baby closer she fumbled with the unsavoury handkerchief in which some money was tied.

"I'll tell you that to-morrow. Get home—don't hurry about it: you've not far to go—and get straight to bed as I've told you."

"Yes, doctor. Thank you, doctor. It's easier to pay as you go. You know where you be, then. It mounts up suhmawt awful when once you let them things slide."

"Don't I know it, my dear! Good night, Mrs. Tibbetts. Next, please!"

As the next patient entered, Dr. Bradley dipped his pen in the silver inkpot and made a note on his list for the visit next morning. Then, beneath his last day-book entry, he wrote in his shapely copperplate:

Tibbetts, Mrs. George.

Back of 16 Crabb's Lane.

Mist. Expectorans. 3vi. 2g quartis horis.

Beneath the prescription he ruled a horizontal line, and opposite the entry he wrote the single word: *Paid.*

So it went on—there were no intermissions in work that evening—an unending procession of shawled women and collarless men who sat awkwardly before him with greasy caps in their hands. The clothes of these patients carried with them the aura of their wearers' vocations: the oily reek of factory-hands, the sooty odour of chain-makers; the smell of sulphurous carbon and sweat impregnating the duds of colliers come from the pits, the characteristic tang of each group variegated by more personal and transitory aromas—whiffs of soap-suds and cooking and babies, wafts of beer and fried fish—and the whole enveloped (for outside rain still fell) in an odour of damp and

not too cleanly clothing. Dr. Bradley smelt all these and unconsciously noted them without being revolted. If his eyes had stayed as sharp as his nose, he sometimes told people, he would feel a younger man. Except in the surgery, he was a heavy smoker, too.

In they came, one by one, as a rule. Occasionally an older woman accompanied a friend or daughter to give her moral support or discuss some intimate question: women rarely felt shy asking Dr. Bradley now, he was too old to "matter." Sometimes a harassed mother dragged in a small boy with swollen face tied up in a handkerchief. There were visiting dentists in Sedgely and school inspectors; but the local practice was still to hang on to a tooth as long as it didn't ache, and, as soon as it ached to get rid of it without any tinkering; and the doctor, his parrot-beaked molar forceps concealed in the skirts of his coat, was a "dab-hand at tooth-drawing." One swift pounce, a look of terror, an agonised shriek that made the waiting-room shiver, and then Dr. Bradley holding the bloody trophy aloft in triumph in the forceps' jaws: a cheap shillingsworth. "Spit it out, young man," he was saying. "The more it bleeds, the better. That brute won't trouble you again. Do you want to take it home and show your dad?" Of course he did!

They were not a comely race, these Sedgely folk: a century of industrial labour for the most part ill-paid does not breed beauty or improve physique. The skin of the women's faces—though it had been

scrubbed before "going to the doctor's"—was usually pallid and greasy, its pores choked with particles of carbon which, even when the sky seems clear, descends perpetually in an impalpable dust from the upper air. As for the men's—not one could be expected to be shaved before they went to the barber's after football on Saturdays. They were generally a stunted race, whose stature generations of work underground had adapted, one might have thought, to the cramped attitudes of the coal-face and, as if this were not enough, had further abbreviated by the bow-legs of early rickets. These men were stocky and stalwart, long-armed and short-thighed; the middle-aged women flat-chested, thin-lipped, the corners of their mouths dragged down by the skin-muscles that stretch from the face to the breasts gave their faces a look of anxiety if not of severity. Only the faces of the unmarried girls whom, born into an easier age, life had treated more kindly, showed a hearty robustness. They were more generously made than their mothers or even than the men; their eyes had a boldness born of the physical self-confidence of youth. Theirs were the only eyes among all those that watched the doctor and waited on his words which sometimes showed themselves critical of his age and appearance, a trifle contemptuous in secret of the mild little jokes he was inclined to make when he teased them—just as though they were still kids, they thought, and not "young ladies" (who had their hair "permed" and all

at sixpence a curler) and a chap waiting round the corner to take them to the flicks!

They were not very ill, as a rule, these folks who came to the surgery—unless, like poor Mrs. Tibbetts, they could not afford a visit and were afraid of piling up debts—not too ill to gossip or joke, as one could judge from the babble of talk that flowed through the waiting-room door when it opened and was suddenly hushed when it closed. Their broad speech was laced with humour, not always delicate, and Dr. Bradley, who was skilled in their idiom and knew when a joke could be taken, spoke to them as one of themselves. That was why, he believed, they were more honest with him than they were with the parsons, those poor physicians of souls for ever handicapped by the self-conscious repressions induced by their cloth. He knew his Black Country man—that was easy enough. He knew his Black Country woman. It was this knowledge of human nature, at its best and at its most degraded, his acquaintance with their exaltations of spirit, of which the most common was inconceivable fortitude, no less than with the bitterest abasements of the flesh, which made his patients trust him. His mind was not conversant, he would have confessed, with the latest achievements of science. His memory was not what it had been; he had long since forgotten all but the most essential facts he had learnt as a student, while the field of medicine had so widened during his time that most newly-qualified men would

have been appalled at his ignorance of modern methods of diagnosis and treatment. He felt humble before them; he felt humble before the young man who had bought his practice. Yet, in spite of these defects of medical knowledge, he had something which they had not: an eye trained, without his being aware of it, to observe, a mind quickened by habit to read the significance of the least departure from the norm of health, a store of unrealized experience from which came an instinct resembling that supplementary sense which enabled him to find his way downstairs in the dark. He did not reason about his cases. He looked and he knew. His prime sources of information were limited to his five senses; so that the colour, the temperature, the very smell of a patient's skin, the way he spoke or breathed, or put down his feet or wrote his name, told him as much, in a moment of almost unconscious deduction, as men younger than he could learn by the systematic use of their diagnostic precision.

Fifty years of practice had sharpened this faculty, and it was a good thing that they had, for though his waning physical powers made it necessary for him to conserve his strength, the number of his patients did not diminish. It enabled him, on such a busy evening as this when the contents of the waiting-room appeared inexhaustible, to distinguish, without too much effort, between those patients whose cases demanded investigation and those whom he could deal with perfunctorily on the evidence of his eyes.

Even so, as this evening wore on, Dr. Bradley began to feel tired and to realize that much virtue had gone out of him. He was thankful, indeed, when the clock showing a few minutes past eight, a crooked little man with reefer jacket buttoned up round a woollen comforter hobbled in crabwise on a stick and announced himself as the last. His name was Lijah Hodgetts. In the surgery his face was familiar, for though he had long since passed the age-limit of sickness-benefit and had lived, somehow or other, for years on his old-age pension, he had never yet fallen back on the "parish" for treatment, but insisted on paying his way. Over and over again Dr. Bradley had told him he was a fool not to avail himself of the ticket to which he was entitled and for which he would receive precisely similar treatment; but old Lijah shook his head with an air of wizened cunning: "Nay, gaffer," he would wheeze, "I bain't going to drink no physic out of the parish bottle. Yo' make a drop up fresh for me, the same as yo' would if I paid for it." And with a bony, wool-mittened hand, he laid on the desk a shilling, sometimes in coppers: the fee for a consultation and medicine which had been usual in the days of his youth. He laid the coin on the table now along with an eight-ounce bottle.

"You're the last? Well, I can't say I'm sorry, Lijah," the doctor laughed. "I've had a big surgery this evening. Sit ye down. What is it? The same old rats?"

Lijah Hodgetts shook his head violently from side to side, to show how he felt about them. "What a queer little skinny old monkey he's grown," Dr. Bradley thought: "how he's aged in the last few years!" It was odd that he never thought of himself as having grown old: he had never had time in his life to think of the changes in himself, though his eye always marked the changes in other people.

"Ay, gaffer, them varmin's be at me again. They always starts up of their own accord when November comes in, though they lets me be in the summer. It bain't day-times they worrits me. It's when I gets warm in bed at night they starts gnawing away at the j'int's so bad I can't get no ease whichever way I shifts me, and by morning I be stiff as a post. I reckon to loosen up, thanks be, about dinner-time."

"I know . . . I know. I've had some myself," Dr. Bradley smiled. "But what does the Bible say, Lijah? You're a great chapel-man. The years of man are three-score and ten, it says. How old are you, anyway?"

"Seventy-seven, the missus reckons. Her be two year younger nor me."

"Seventy-five. The same age as myself. You've not much to complain of when all's said and done. Seventy-seven and six children living. I remember the night when you fetched me out for your first. Fifty years ago that was, as near as makes no matter."

"And our Jimmy's a grandfather now. Mother had a letter come yesterday."

"And you're a great-grandfather. We've had a good innings, you know, Lijah."

"Ah, I wunna gainsay it, gaffer, but for these here bosted rheumatics." The little man's face gave a twist, as though the mere thought of them hurt him. Dr. Bradley, seeing him wince, became conscious of his own stiff knees. He disliked these unwelcome reminders of age, and straightened them vigorously under the desk. He forced himself to feel young and brisk, though it wasn't easy.

"All right, Lija," he said. "I'll mix you some medicine, the same as you had last time. And I'll give you a new bottle too."

He shambled away behind the dispensary partition. His knees were not so stiff after all, he thought, when he came to move them. But they were lax and weak at the back; he knew that his gait was an old man's gait, and hated it. As he weighed and mixed the salicylate, it suddenly occurred to him that this bottle was probably the last he would ever dispense at that counter where he had compounded so many thousands. No less than thirty a day: more than two hundred a week. Ten thousand a year: in fifty years, at the very least half a million! Half a million bottles of medicine, and this the last! As he reflected on this stupendous figure, he laid out a sheet of white paper and wrapped the bottle up in it, sealing the ends with

invisible dabs of wax, with a precision of folding that made it a work of art. He came back to the desk and presented this thing of beauty to Lijah.

The old man took it suspiciously: "Why, you've a'wrapped him up!" He stripped off the paper with gnarled and dirty fingers. He took out the cork and sniffed: "This here don't smell like the last. It smells of peppermint."

"That's to make it go down easier; and peppermint's good for the wind. Otherwise it's the same."

"That may be; but I reckon as physic by rights ought to taste like physic. The stronger it smells and the hotter it stings the more good it does you. I don't want it weakening, gaffer. What I want is summat to make them niggling varmint sit up. How so be, if yo' says it's the same," he added reluctantly, "I'll take your word for it, you being who you are." He rose, painfully straightening his crooked back by one or two inches. "There'll be one thing more," he said, "as I promised the missus to ask you. They say down the road, and I heard the same up at the cross, that yo'm jacking up like and leaving Sedgebury and that that young chap what's been helping you was taking your place. When they told me that, I answered back straight it was a bosted lie. 'The old doctor a'going?' I says. 'He won't leave that surgery of his'n, not afore they a'carries him out of it feet first! He wain't never leave Sedgebury,' I says 'so long as he'm able to get astride the old tricycle. And if it comes to that,' I says,

‘why, I’ll go up to get a bottle of physic and ask him myself.’”

He sat there, that small simian figure, waiting confidently for a reply Dr. Bradley found it hard to give him. Faced with this evidence of passionate confidence in himself, this obstinate loyalty, his retirement seemed to him, for the first time, something in the nature of a betrayal. Yet the truth must be told.

“Yes, Lijah: I’m jacking up, as you call it. I think it’s high time I retired. A man can go on working till he drops, but when he comes near dropping his work’s not much good. I’m old and I’m out of date, Lijah—I know that if you don’t—and I’m leaving you in good hands I can give you my word for it. Dr. Harwood, who’s following me, knows his job a lot better than I do.”

“He may do that an’ all, but it won’t never be the same; and I tell yo’, we old folks won’t like it. Take my missus, now. Dost think her be going to bare her breast, if so be she were took ill, to a young chap what looks no older than her own grandson? It be a poor look-out for all on us, that’s what I say.”

“Well, well . . . There it is. I can’t alter it now. I’m going to-morrow. You’ll find Dr. Harwood all right; have no fear of that.”

“I should never a’tthought it on you, and that’s speaking straight,” the old man said.

He took up his stick, thrust the medicine into his pocket and hobbled towards the door. Dr. Bradley

smiled. "Aren't you going to say 'good-bye,' then?"

"I bain't going to say naught," the old man muttered resentfully.

Dr. Bradley followed him and locked the door of the empty waiting-room. The linoleum floor was muddy with footmarks; the dismal place stank of damp clothes. He turned down the light and returned to the consulting-room. He picked up his visiting-list, adjusted his spectacles, and glanced at it. Three names, including that of the woman named Tibbetts, had been added to it. A long round, he thought. It came as a shock to him to realize that he would not make it. In half an hour, when young Harwood came back from North Bromwich, he would have to explain the nature of every case. He turned down the gas-lamp in the consulting-room too. Without looking behind him—it was useless, he knew, to prolong this poignant moment—he returned to the house.

(iv)

The little living-room looked and smelt desolate. During his surgery-hour, the woman who "did for him" by the day had piled the grate roaring high with sulphurous South Staffordshire coal, pulled an easy-chair up to the fire, and laid the table for supper; but these friendly attentions could not give the room a sense of comfort. The carpet had been stripped from

the floor, the pictures from the walls, whose faded papering showed dark shadows of their shapes; the bookshelves yawned empty, revealing cobwebbed corners and patches of dust, and the cases into which the books had been packed and wedged with cushions and pads of newspaper enhanced the room's atmosphere of unrest and impermanence. Dr. Bradley lifted the down-turned plate with which Mrs. Roberts had covered his food. The slices of cold meat revolted him; he had neither heart nor stomach for food; yet, feeling weak for want of it, he went into the kitchen and mixed himself a glass of hot milk and Sanatogen, his favourite solace and stay in moments of nervous fatigue. He sat and sipped the comforting stuff in front of the fire; but his restless thoughts would not be still. There was nothing in the morning newspaper but reports and rumours of wars, and he had read it through already. Forgetting that it was empty, he turned automatically to the bookshelf in search of some old favourite that might drug or distract his mind. That showed, he thought, how stupid and confused he was, though, even if he had found one, he knew that he could not have concentrated. He switched on the portable wireless set which had not been packed. After a rattle of atmospherics a refined voice spoke: *"This is the West Midland Programme. We are taking you over to the Palais de Danse, Sparkheath, where Billy Fitzclare and The Cads will play a selection from their repertoire. Their first number is a two-*

step: Kissing in the Dark, from the screen success 'Harlem Melody.' After that they will play . . ." He switched off the set immediately. He rarely got pleasure from music, though he had always liked a good tune and sometimes made a visit to North Bromwich when the D'Oyly Carte Company put on a week of Gilbert and Sullivan. The symphonic music with which the atmosphere of the globe vibrated in these days merely puzzled him. As for this stuff—hot jazz, or swing, or whatever they called it—this accompaniment of the pandemic of erotic tarantism which had smitten the post-war world and infected even such humble places as Sedgebury—it did not puzzle him in the least (its purpose was clear enough: it was a crude aphrodisiac) but he hated it even more. At nine o'clock the Third News would come on in the National Programme. He supposed that he had better tune in and put his watch right and listen to it until young Harwood came. He switched on again and turned the knob. As he found the wave-length, the six "pips" of the time-signal sounded and the Weather Forecast began: "*A deep depression centred over the Midlands is stationary, and a shallow disturbance from the Atlantic is approaching the British Isles. Weather will be generally cloudy with rain in the west and north-west.*" The front-door bell tinkled. His visitor was on time.

Dr. Bradley rose and ushered him in. He was a tall young man—nearly as tall as Dr. Bradley himself

had been in his youth and taller than him now. He had a long, wedge-shaped face with rather small, hard eyes, and cheeks so red and clean-shaven that they seemed to have been scraped. He looked less like a doctor to him than a young North Bromwich manufacturer or business-man—though, of course, in these levelling days all people with incomes above a moderate figure looked much the same. And if Dr. Bradley had not exactly taken to his successor, he certainly respected him. That long head was screwed on all right, those rather calculating eyes were rigidly straight. For the contents of the head his respect was even greater. This young man had taken an honours degree at the North Bromwich University and was within sight of the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons which, in Dr. Bradley's day, had been the mark of a consultant surgeon. He knew all about things that the older man had only vaguely heard of: the mysteries of hormones and bio-chemistry and electro-therapeutics, the miracles of radium. In the science of diagnosis he was acquainted with the use of instruments of precision which made Dr. Bradley's methods appear elementary. Yet in spite of this intimidating efficiency and superiority in equipment, he appeared neither unfriendly, nor inconsiderate, nor even condescending. At times he seemed almost artificially deferent. Even in personal relations his attitude was direct and his reactions were clear-cut. If he knew what he wanted, and made no bones about

it, he betrayed no impatience at moments when their difference in pace and in temperament must surely have irked him. He had decided to buy this practice and was faced with the task of digging the old man out. He tackled it like a surgeon, drastically, methodically, being careful to inflict no more pain than was absolutely necessary yet to make the operation as thorough and the wound as clean as possible.

"Well, well, here you are. Sit down," Dr. Bradley said. "You've had a big day, I expect. Is everything settled?"

"Yes. The purchase-money's all right. The cheque was paid into your banking account this afternoon. Everything's in order."

"Good, good. Won't you have a drink? There's whisky on the table."

"No, thanks, doctor. I bolted my supper in the station refreshment-room. Never drink between meals. Do you mind if I talk business? You look a bit fagged to-night. Would you rather wait till to-morrow? You'll get a good sleep in any case: I'm due to take over at midnight."

"Not a bit. If you've anything to say, this is the time to say it. I'm listening."

"All right. Well, the only thing now outstanding is this question of book-debts. I took the ledger to my lawyer, and he's gone into it thoroughly. Of course I'd much rather take over the practice as a running concern: I mean it might be rather awkward to carry

on with nothing more than the petty cash that comes into the surgery. So I want these book-debts, naturally. That's where the trouble comes in. You know, sir, if you don't mind my saying so, this ledger's in an awful mess."

Dr. Bradley shook his head. "Yes, yes. I'm afraid it is."

"My lawyer's been through it carefully and made a précis. Have you any idea what you're owed at the present moment?"

"Not the least. I'm afraid I've never troubled to think. I've had no time for it."

"Well, at the present moment you're owed more than four thousand pounds. That's cutting out all the bills that are statute-barred, and there are dozens of them. Some of the bills have not been rendered more often than once in a year. Others haven't been sent in at all. There are people in this book whom you've attended for twenty years and more without their ever having paid a halfpenny, and you've kept on attending them just the same. For all I know, some of them may be dead. My lawyer was shocked. 'Damn it all,' he said, 'you're taking over a general medical practice, not a charitable institution.'"

Dr. Bradley smiled and shook his head.

"That's where he's wrong, my dear boy," he said. "You can't have one without the other. That's one of the things about which people make a mistake when they run us doctors down and call us rapacious."

"But four thousand pounds, doctor! Really. . . . And you go on attending them."

"Somebody has to attend them, you know. Most of 'em would pay if they could."

"But the point is, you see. . . . Well, I've contracted to take over these book-debts at an agreed valuation, haven't I? And my chap in North Bromwich considers they're hardly worth the paper they're written on. Of course, if you handed the lot over to a debt-collecting agency . . ."

"Oh, no: you couldn't do that!" Dr. Bradley sat bolt upright.

"I quite agree. Definitely. You couldn't. That is rather my point. You see I had calculated the value of these debts at round about five hundred pounds. I was thinking of offering you three hundred for them, you know. You mentioned that sum, you remember?"

Did he not remember, indeed! That figure had been an important part of the nice calculations on which his future was based: an annuity, at ten per cent, on the capital sum of twelve hundred pounds, representing eighteen months' purchase of the practice on a three year average, plus three hundred pounds for the book-debts. Fifteen hundred in all: a hundred and fifty a year; just on three pounds a week. A new calculation refused to work out in his mind. He had never been good at figures: Ten per cent on twelve hundred. That was easy. Result: forty-eight shillings—or was it, perhaps, forty-six? Forty-six shillings a

week! There were families in Sedgebury, with men on the dole, which drew more than that. Any foreman mechanic could better it. The prospect made his heart sink. "Of course, I don't eat much," he told himself. He pulled his wild thoughts together and smiled and said: "Well?"

"Well. . . There it is. I'm inclined to agree with my lawyer. After all, if you pay these chaps to advise you, you ought to take their advice."

"And your lawyer advises?"

"He suggests that I offer you a nominal sum which he considers fair. I'm prepared to risk a hundred pounds and make what I can out of them. I should send out all the bills in my name, irrespective of how long they had been owing, and take my chance of what the old ones brought in. It would be a good way of calling attention to the fact that the practice had changed hands."

"You wouldn't collect them?" Dr. Bradley asked anxiously: he was still floundering in the complications of compound arithmetic: fifty-two into two thousand four hundred—fifty-two into two hundred and forty. If there were fifty weeks in the year and not fifty-two, it would be easier: then you could cross off the final figure of the dividend and divide by five.

"Not exactly collect. Of course I should go easy at first till I knew where I was. After that a little gentle pressure. Even if you agree with the new figure I've suggested—a hundred pounds, it'll be a bit of a

gamble. It's natural, after all, that I should want to see some of my money back. It's most of it borrowed anyway. And I shall have an awful lot of expenses as well."

"I don't really see why you should. It won't cost you much to get the house into order. It's a snug little place."

The young man surveyed the dismantled room with contempt: "To start with, there's electric light. The wiring and all that costs money."

"I should have thought you could put that off for a year or two."

Harwood shook his head. "You've a lot more patience than I have, doctor. Besides which, I can't carry on without it. I need electricity for all sorts of things: diathermy, ionization. It's what one's used to, you know. Why, even for lighting, gas would drive me mad, apart from the smell of it. And don't forget, there's the garage to build and the surgery to be re-conditioned. The electricity people are coming to-morrow, by the way. When are your things going out?"

"The van will be here to-morrow morning early. They're not going far. I'm putting them into store, you know."

"That's quite sound, I'm sure. You've earned a holiday anyway. If any message comes in the night, send it round to me at the 'Bull's Head.' You needn't worry about those book-debts. I'll leave you the

ledger; you can have a look over it yourself. Tomorrow morning we'll talk it over and settle the thing between us. Don't get up, sir. I can find my way out all right. It's still beastly outside. Good night."

Dr. Bradley nodded. He heard the street-door slam. Though he liked this young man and respected him, it was a great relief to feel he had gone. He went as he came, rather like a shrewd, blustering wind which, when one is young, is a stimulating thing with a lash that whips the nerves and makes the blood leap, the heart sing. But when one grows old, he thought, a trifle tired, a little shaky at the knees (though brisk in one's movements) it becomes more and more difficult to keep one's feet (or one's head) in a turmoil. What one wants above all is peace, just quietude for its own sake. If people will only let one be and allow one to go where one wishes, and at one's own pace—that's the crux of the matter—one can keep on indefinitely without really feeling one's age.

(v)

An odd business, this growing old. . . . "A man is as old as his arteries," he thought, "and my arteries are not so bad." He slipped the fingers of his left hand round his right wrist (if he had caught one of his patients doing such a thing he would have roared at him like an angry lion) and felt the unhurried

throb of a steady pulse in the radial artery. Not a missing beat. Thus for seventy-five years, since the navel-cord was cut and its business began, had his heart, that hollow bundle of unstriped muscle-fibres, contracted not less than sixty-five times in each minute. Thus it would go on beating, he supposed, till some unforeseen obstruction impeded it, or the nerves that kept it at work, like a watch's mainspring, failed and let it run down—in which case, after all, it was better stopped than beating.

There was, he reflected, another popular saying: A man is as old as he feels. Dr. Bradley's examination of this dictum was not quite so satisfactory. There were times, indeed, when he was forced to confess to himself that he felt mortally old. So long as he was actually at work and engrossed in it these feelings were not apparent. He could still do his day's round of visits and take his two surgeries, as he had that day, without faltering. It was only when the day's work was finished and he sat down by the fire, as he was doing now, that he felt the desire to put his feet up, a disinclination to concentrate upon anything—even the newspaper—and noticed a tendency to nod off to sleep. There was nothing disquieting in this. After all, the right to take his ease was no more than a proper reward for his labours, doubly so in a man who no longer slept for more than six hours at night. When he woke, before daylight, his mind was active and clear enough—indeed, almost too clear. At such times

he would instantly remember names which, during the previous day, had irritatingly escaped him. He could always remember the names of people he had known many years—even the minutest details of illnesses for which he had attended them and which they had forgotten. It was the names of new patients that troubled him. Even when he wrote them down in his day-book to make certain that he wouldn't forget them, he could not fix them: what was part of his mind one instant was gone the next. It had taken him a couple of weeks to get hold of young Harwood's name. That, of course, was a symptom of age, and one even more striking was the way in which, during those long nocturnal vigils before it grew light, his mind tended more and more to go back to the scenes of his childhood, his student-days, his early married life; and the strange and rather delightful thing was that, when it returned to them, he didn't regard them objectively. He was part of them; he lived them over again. His mind was not bound by his body's limitations. He played as a child, he ran wild as a medical student, he made love as a man with the ardour of youth in his blood. And how rich in its variety of experience and emotion that long life of his had been! How much richer (he couldn't help feeling) than most lives of to-day—than the life of young Harwood, for instance, who showed him such faintly-patronizing politeness and deference just because he was old, and (here was the cream of the joke) imagined in the cock-

sureness of youth that their object didn't see through him.

Yes, that was assuredly one of the privileges of age—what people called “living in the past”: to sit still, with one's legs up, apparently nodding asleep, forgetting the present and taking one's choice of so much remote experience of which the pain hurt as little in memory as a woman's birth-pangs, and the pleasures were bathed in a light of transfiguring enchantment.

As he sat there that night, his half-closed eyelids concealing the desolation of the silent dismantled living-room, conscious only of the warmth of the settling fire on his legs and, from time to time, the spatter of rain on the window-panes, Dr. Bradley's furrowed face, with its crowning wisps of white hair and the steel-rimmed spectacles still negligently poised half-way down his nose, wore an expression of child-like content and composure. He breathed slowly, with quiet regularity. His blue lips smiled. His spirit was far away. None would have guessed that, at that moment, he was not an old man nodding asleep, but a boy awake in Lesswardine, the village where he had been born.

CHAPTER TWO

(1)

THOUGH he had never set foot in Lesswardine since he left it at the age of nineteen, Dr. Bradley had always preserved a private vision of the place and felt, in the back of his mind, that he was destined to end his days in the village where he had begun them. He had even chosen the house in which he was going to live: not the cottage down by the bridge in which he had been born, with its long strip of garden clogged with apple and damson trees which had overgrown the space allotted to them, but one even smaller, half-way up the hill down whose slopes the village trickled, and opposite the house of old Mr. Mortimore in which he had spent the years that settled his destiny.

This chosen haven of retirement stood full on the street, only separated from the roadway by the width of its whitened threshold and a corresponding narrow flower-bed, gay in spring with tawny gillyflowers and in autumn with odorous trusses of chrysanthemums, maroon and bronze. The cottage itself, unlike the rest of the village and the church, which were built of a purplish sandstone, was lime-washed pink, and distinguished from its neighbours by a perpetual air of

modest cheerfulness. He could never remember it save when its walls appeared to be bathed in sunshine: in the full glare of cloudless skies or in watery storm-light. Above its flowered borders the windows were full of pot-plants, straggling geraniums and old-fashioned pelargoniums and musk; and sometimes a hibernating tortoiseshell butterfly fluttered behind the panes. No doubt it faced south. In the days of his youth he had never considered such things as the lie of the land. He could not even remember what must surely have been the most impressive features in the Lesswardine landscape: the blue dome of Radnor Forest, rising to southward, and to northward the more irregular mountainous masses of the Forest of Clun. The child's mind was too deeply absorbed in things immediate to his eyes—the falling village street, with its rain-scoured surface; the little shops with bottles of sweets in the windows; the blacksmith's; the baker's; the dogs that sunned themselves in the dust; the cats on the doorsteps; the white ducks that waddled down to their grayling-dimpled swimming-pool above the low weir; the bridge, with its piers and embrasures; the river itself, clear and swift or tawny with storm-water and flecked with barmy foam—to be aware of these present magnitudes—much less of the gigantic system of ridge and furrow that lay to eastward: the granite saddle-backs of the Clees and Comus' forest-fleeced Chase; the long fold of Wenlock Edge and the troughs of Temeside, Apedale and Corvedale

lying between. It was only when, late in life, a growing curiosity impelled him to buy an ordnance map with brown-coloured contours, that he had realized the romantic shape of the country in which he had been born. What he remembered most of Lesswardine was its quietude and the sweetness of its air; its general atmosphere of ease and irresponsibility (which was simply that of childhood) enveloped in a bouquet of certain poignant and primary smells: the school-room's inky dankness, the smell of worm-eaten oak in the church, the nutty aroma of hot bread-crust carried home from the bakehouse, the ammoniacal whiff of the blacksmith's forge. Such were the sensations to which Dr. Bradley's memory clung, those which, in his retirement, he had set his mind on recapturing. When he dreamed of them and desired them it did not occur to him that they were the most volatile of all essences: the perfume of careless youth.

Not that his youth, sublimely placid in retrospect, had been so careless as distance had made it appear. During his father's lifetime, indeed, the boy had lived, without knowing it, in the heart of a tornado of which everybody connected with that stormy creature but himself had been unpleasantly aware. Matthew Bradley was not a native of Lesswardine, nor, indeed of Shropshire. Where he had come from, or why he had chosen to settle there—if the word "settle" can be admitted as applicable to such a stormy petrel—his son never discovered. He did not even know what

were his mother's origins, and for that he was sorrier.

His father, as the quickening light of his memory for far-off things now luridly revealed him, was a man in the early thirties (a young man by his present reckoning), tall, powerfully-built—he stooped when he entered the cottage down by the river—with a high-coloured complexion, partly concealed by a crisp growth of well-trimmed black beard and moustache against which his full lips appeared almost unnaturally red, his teeth unnaturally white. He had fine dark eyes, extremely mobile and lively, and a deep voice with a rasp in it, so that when he spoke he almost seemed to growl. Not that he often spoke. When he strode into the house—which was always unexpectedly—his manner was generally glowering and moody; yet, even when he was silent, his presence radiated an aura of suppressed force or even of violence. All his movements were brusque and expansive. It seemed almost as if that small house were incapable of containing his body, even as his body, splendidly made as it was, irked his fulminant spirit. The jet-black hair grew low and stiff on his forehead (as later it had grown on his son's) combining with the straight strong eyebrows to give his face an aspect charged and brooding. An incalculable stormy silence enveloped him; yet no sooner had the storm broken with tropical violence than the man became smiling, gay, loquacious—even boisterous. One of the doctor's earliest (and rather terrible) memories was of how, one day, in a

quick revulsion from gloom, his father had suddenly laughed, caught him by the arm and swung him up to his shoulder, so violently that his head had cracked on the ceiling. He had heard his mother cry: "Matthew, don't . . . you'll hurt him!" And the next thing he remembered was lying dazed on the sofa with a vinegar cloth on his head and his mother bending over him while his father stalked to and fro, his boots ringing on the slabbed floor, blotting out the light from the window as he passed and repassed.

He had no idea—that was one of the things he was going to find out if anyone who remembered such ancient history still lived in Lesswardine—what his father's business had been. It was certainly one that took him far afield. Occasionally he left them at peace for a week at a time, driving out in a high mud-spattered gig whose vermilion wheels he would sluice in the river on the morning after his return. It probably, he thought, had something to do with horses. His breeches and skirted melton coat always smelt of them. Perhaps he lived by horse-coping. The scullery window-sill was crowded with drenches and ointments and boluses, and the beast that drew the red-wheeled gig was never the same for long. One week its colour would be grey, the next roan or chestnut. He certainly frequented stock-markets and horse-fairs; for one dark evening he had come home half-blind with a bunged-up, blackened eye—the result of having called a Clun Forest drover a Welshman. (The Forest, in

fact, was full of Welsh blood.) It needed an insult as deadly as that to induce a man in his right mind to square up to Matthew Bradley! When a circumstance of that kind kept him at home for more than a day or two he soon became restless and prowled through the little house like a caged wild animal. They were the only occasions, save in such moments of boisterous good-humour as that in which he had swung him up to the ceiling, when he took any notice of his son. Sometimes he took the child with him to fish in the Teme; but the wielding of a rod, which seemed like a twig in his hands, was no proper ploy for those steely muscles. There was no patience in him; he could not abide inaction; and if fish were not rising he would switch his long line through the air trying to catch the sand-martins that flickered and dipped to the water. Dr. Bradley remembered the great bellow of triumph he had let out when he hooked one; the terrified swoops and plunges of the bird as he played it fluttering in mid-air. He kept dogs as well as horses—never less than three at a time: lean, powerful creatures of a gipsy breed that he fancied, whose ribs made a pattern beneath their brindled coats. They were meek-looking animals, though never friendly, and incredibly swift. Matthew loved to take them out coursing; and when they had run down a hare or a rabbit, he would skin the carcass and throw it for them to savage, and laugh as they fought for it. Though his dogs lived on raw meat, he never reckoned to buy for them. The dogs,

suspicious of everyone else, were devoted to him. When he drove away on his mysterious trade he always took them with him: two sitting upright beside him on the box, the third running between the wheels beneath it. John Bradley was glad that his father did not leave them at home. He distrusted their meek remoteness and was always afraid of them.

(II)

In spite of the wild life he led when he was abroad Matthew never came home drunk. If a man of his strength had let drink get the better of him there was no knowing what might have happened. No liquor was kept in the house but a barrel of cider of which he drank sparingly. This abstinence, so oddly out of key with the rest of his behaviour, can have been due to nothing but his respect for his wife. It was strange, Dr. Bradley thought, looking back into those dim recesses of childhood, that the figure of his father, whom he feared, should appear so much more definite than that of his mother, whom he had loved. Yet so it was: the difference between the two memories was that between a huge, crudely realistic and strongly-coloured portrait in oils and a pastel miniature, a trifle faded at that. Try as he would, he could never succeed in recalling her features. He could remember words she had spoken (such as that anxious cry: "Matthew . . .

don't! You'll hurt him.") but never the timbre of her voice. Perhaps there was something significant in this elusiveness which made him doubt the veracity of the single faded photograph of her which he possessed: a yellow-brown faded print of a girl—she could hardly have been more—in evening dress: a smiling oval face, in which only the eyes remained as dark pin-points, above a slender throat emerging from billows of tulle. He could never reconcile that face, indefinite as it was, with his even more shadowy memories, which were not those of a woman of flesh and blood (and flesh of his flesh) but of a small, quiet presence, the source of emotions, infinitely gentle and tender but curiously without form. That he had loved her blindly and utterly, he felt certain; yet he could not have sworn to the colour of those eyes, though he guessed they were dark, or of her hair, which he could not believe to have been so dark as the print suggested. Perhaps there were coppery hues in it which the plate interpreted as black. He could not say.

Yet, shadowy as this woman seemed at the distance of nearly seventy years, her quietude must have had strength in it. How, otherwise, could one explain the power she possessed over her flamboyant husband, the respect she enforced on him? Why did he never beat her, as other men beat their wives? There was one possible explanation. Deep in his mind Dr. Bradley had always nursed the conviction that his mother was not merely a creature of finer clay than his father but one of **better**

birth and of better breeding. Even at this distance of time he could remember the differences of manner with which they had been treated in the village itself. Such respect as Matthew Bradley commanded was due to his physical strength and his reputation as a tough customer. When he went swinging down the street with his lurchers at heel, men sometimes greeted him as Mr. Bradley, though quite as often as "Matt"; but when his wife went shopping in Lesswardine, or to church on Sundays, the men who bade her good morning touched their hats, and the shop-keepers, solid folk and no respecters of persons, called her "Ma'am" or "Mrs. Bradley, ma'am." There must have been something more than pity that earned this marked contrast of deference. Dr. Bradley, thinking it over, felt inclined to believe that it signified the acknowledgment of some social distinction accorded without being claimed; that his mother, perhaps, was a young woman of good family who had made the mistake (if mistake it were) of running away with a handsome keeper or stud-groom, and that her secret had leaked out. Such scandalous accidents happened often enough in the best-regulated county families, and respect for "family" in those days was deeper than in these.

Mrs. Bradley was certainly what is called "a lady". Even his childish ear could recognize the difference between her accent and his father's. When he spoke as his father and the village children spoke she would

sometimes correct him. He had reason to remember this from the shame he had felt when his schoolfellows mocked and mimicked the pernicky speech she taught him. There were other haphazard recollections that reinforced the theory of his mother's gentility. He remembered one evening in particular: at that time he could not have been more than six or seven years old. It was on the day after one of those violent thunderstorms which his father's black moods brought with him. He had heard its reverberations the night before as he lay in bed. Next morning his father had whirled away in his red-wheeled gig with a greater flourish than usual, just as if to convince himself that nothing unseemly had happened. His mother had stood at the gate and waved her husband good-bye as Matthew slewed round in his seat and waved his whip to her. But her lips did not smile. All that day her face was blank and preoccupied. When he came home hungry from school and she gave him his tea, she was still in the same dull mood and answered his eager chatter listlessly, without interest. When darkness fell—it must have been late in November—she sat huddled in front of the fire. John sat on the opposite side of the hearth intimidated by her brooding. If the night had not been so black and cold outside he would gladly have escaped from that silence. Then suddenly, almost as if a spell had been snapped, she laughed and came to life. She was laughing still when she picked the child up and fiercely kissed him.

"Get me the candles, Johnny," she said. "It's so gloomy here."

He found a packet in the cupboard. There were six tallow candles in it, but these would not satisfy her. They hunted for candle-ends in the living-room and the scullery until there were ten of them in all. She fixed them in candle-sticks and bottle-necks, and, when she could find no more of these, melted pools of tallow and set them in saucers. When all ten were lit the dark room was filled with their pure, pale light.

"Now wait," she said, nodding, with a solemn finger uplifted but dancing fun in her eyes. "Now wait and see what I'll show you."

She scampered upstairs like a schoolgirl. The child, waiting below, heard the floor of the bedroom creak as she moved to and fro. She was singing to herself, with long intervals between the phrases, an old song of Haydn: *My mother bids me bind my hair*. Its tune was one of the deepest impressions of that strange evening. He never heard it in after years without foolish tears filling his eyes: without seeing again that eerie room made more mysterious than gay by the pallid candlelight. He had been told to wait and he waited, a little bewildered by the communicated tensivity of her incomprehensible excitement. He heard a quick patter of steps; then the stairs creaked; she came down slowly; but the vision that emerged from the stairway's black throat was not the mother he knew but some other person, transfigured and glorious. She was

dressed in a frock of rustling silk which the light of candles made silvery. Her throat and bosom gleamed ivory-white above a gauzy fichu held in place by a brooch with sparkling stones in it. As she stepped from the lowest stair she let fall the hoop she had held sideways. It fell, and the billowing hem fell wide about her ankles. She spread wide her hands—her arms were as white as her throat—and threw back her smiling face. She gave a quick laugh; but now her face was solemn, excitement only in her eyes. Then slowly, deliberately, so smoothly that her feet did not seem to stir, she moved onward towards him, her head held proudly high, her eyes fixed not on him, it seemed, but on something beyond. As she reached him she bowed her head and dropped a low curtsy. The hooped skirt rustled as it collapsed. For a moment she bent her knee with bowed head; then she was up again, laughing:

“Oh, Johnny, you odd little solemn thing,” she cried. “Why d’you stare like that? Have I frightened you? That’s how you must curtsy to the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Just like that; but of course you wear a train as well and a head-dress too. Mrs. Matthew Bradley, Your Majesty! Presented on the occasion of her marriage to Matthew Bradley, Esquire, by the Marchioness of Clun. Don’t you think I’m a grand lady, Johnny? Don’t you think I’m lovely and exquisite? Ah, but wait till I dance! They say I dance divinely.”

She began to dance, humming to herself as she moved a Viennese waltz-tune. She whirled round and round, her head thrown back, her lips smiling, her eyes half-closed. The silk skirt flew out as she turned; like a pale moth she swirled and eddied; the candles wavered in the draught; their flickering pin-points sparkled in the jewel at her breast. Faster and faster she swung and circled, her quick feet invisible, till the small, mean room seemed possessed by that fury of rhythmical movement. She swirled round and round, as though she, too, were possessed and could not stop; but now her lips were wide open, her cheeks flushed; she panted for breath; until, all of a sudden, she stopped, staring wildly in front of her, and put her hand to her heart and swayed giddily, clutching the table for support, and, as suddenly, clapped her hands to her eyes and burst into tears. Then, still sobbing, she shook her head violently, and picked up her skirt and was gone.

What had happened after that, Dr. Bradley could not remember. His last fragment of memory was the sight of her disappearing up the dark stairway: an impression of some bright creature bedraggled and crushed, a moth with a broken wing, a gauzy mayfly beaten down by lashing of rain. But he could remember clearly enough the puzzled bewilderment, the impotence, the pain he had felt at that moment. It was the only occasion in his life on which he had seen his mother cry. Even when his father raved and

threatened most wildly, she held her peace. She must have been a proud, silent woman, he thought.

That was the trouble with all these early memories: their vast lacunæ of misty darkness, amid which, like glimpses of roadway caught by a traveller through clearings in a fog, detached incidents, sensations and pictures, not always important, arbitrarily revealed themselves. For the most part the backward vista lay shrouded. After the evening, when his mother had danced and cried before him, stretched a long, blank interval. It was blank not because his mind at that time had been less sensitive or receptive than before; not because his life had become emptier but because it had been fuller of a multitude of sights and sounds that struggled for precedence and cancelled each other out. The instinct of selectiveness which is the birth-right of children and poets, had been gradually crushed beneath the weight of more active experience. Those later schooldays, too, were certainly happy: and memories of equable happiness are more fugitive than those of pain. His schoolfellows' mimicking of his speech, which had bitten deep into his soul when he was smaller, no longer distressed him. He was a strong, healthy lad, endowed with the heritage of his father's superb, swart physique. No bigger boys bullied him: he was high-spirited as well as strong, and ready to use his fists. No small cruelties twisted his nature or scarred it. The tenor of that crowded and uneventful life in the cottage by the river was unbroken by any

events more startling than his father's periodical home-comings, the death of a dog, the arrival of an unbroken horse, the capture of a two-pound cannibal trout on a worm in the rough water at the foot of the garden. He was intelligent, too, beyond the average of Lesswardine children, and did well at school, bringing home a number of prizes which his mother, to his disappointment, took for granted, as though it were a matter of course that her son should prove his superiority. Out of school he fought and bird's-nested and, on hot Sundays, swam in the river. His world was so full of material excitements in which she could not share that his life was not so near to his mother's as it had been before. Perhaps she felt he needed her less. Perhaps—who knows? . . . in later years the idea had often occurred to him—perhaps, in her secret soul there was something that hurt her or disappointed her in seeing the baby who once had seemed so surely part of her, shoot up into an ugly, lanky boy, loud-mouthed, rough-spoken, with a look of his father in his low forehead and jet-black brows, and more than a hint of his nature. During those years Johnny Bradley was nothing but a healthy, hungry young animal, as free from care as the wild ponies that whinnied and kicked the peat-clods from their heels under the dome of Black Mixen on the summit of Radnor Forest.

(III)

They drove the wild ponies down once in every third year. To the village lads this was even a greater excitement than the horse-fair in June at Brampton Bryan where farm-servants were hired and sticky 'Bron-cakes were sold under the oak on the green. It was an important matter for all the moorland farmers, for theirs was the profit. They knew every horse in the troops of vagrants by sight, even though the beasts were so wild and so cunning that they could never draw near them. They had watched the newly-born foals and set down details of shape and colour for evidence, and if, on the day of the "drive," they could convince their neighbours that this pony or that had been born on their land and grazed their sheepwalks, the particular beast became theirs. Unclaimed ponies were counted as the property of the lord of the manor: the Marquess of Clun. Good mares and proved stallions would be turned loose again on the hills to go on breeding; rogue-stallions, of which there were plenty, and promising colts would be haltered and left to kick and plunge till their spirits were broken, and then bought by dealers who re-sold the smaller for pit-work down in the coal-fields and the larger as saddle-cobs. It was the day of the year, above all, for Black Matthew Bradley—not merely because it pleased him to handle horses, and the wilder the better,

but because he had more knowledge of the breed than any man living. His dark eyes were swift to see the true shape of a pony beneath its shaggy exterior; by years of experience he had learnt which of the various strains were hardy, which lacking in speed or stamina. When a good-looking rogue that no other dealer would touch trotted in with the drive, he was always ready to buy if he had the money. If he hadn't the farmers were ready to give him credit. He would make a job of it and sell it all right. There wasn't a pony yet foaled on the hills which he couldn't master.

On the day of the pony-drive in his fourteenth year Johnny Bradley played truant. Though he knew he was in for a birching (schoolmasters did as they would in those days) he was ready to take it cheerfully. One of the other boys, Dai Prosser of Mainstone, a great farm at the foot of the hills in the Barbel Valley, had already got leave from the schoolmaster to ride with his father. They were going to climb up from Wolf-pits, Dai Prosser boasted, a cavalcade of fifteen, and cast a wide circuit, driving the ponies before them and gathering them in to a deserted farm called Nant Goidel (all the hill-farms had Welsh names, though no Welsh was now spoken) whose ruined stone-walled folds lay hidden in a cleft of the Forest not far from Lesswardine. He didn't tell Dai Prosser he meant to go there. He didn't confide in his father. Since he had "grown up"—that was how he thought of himself now, and indeed he was taller than many grown men

—there was no love lost between them. They were too like one another: that, he supposed, was the reason.

Next morning, before his parents were awake, he had dressed and stolen downstairs. He took no food with him: there was always plenty to eat (to say nothing of barrels of beer provided by Lord Clun) at the meeting-place. To-night, sixty-one years later, he could recall the sensations of his departure on that June dawn as clearly as though it were only yesterday. Though he trod on tip-toe and closed the garden gate behind him without a click, one of the lurchers in the outhouse heard him and gave a sharp bark. In a moment all three were howling. As he took to his heels he heard his father cursing them from the bedroom window.

The scents of that midsummer dawn: he could smell them still! Not all the Black Country smoke he had breathed through the greater part of his life could pollute that memory. In the low-lying fields by the river the hay was cut. The thin swathes lay silvered between setting moonlight and grey of daybreak, their scent sweetened the air. Smells of dew-damp grass on the verges through which his boots swished as he ran; minty smells of runnels and ditches; heavy perfume of plummy meadowsweet: all summer in a breath! It was safe to walk on the dry roadway now. It stretched dimly before him: the forthright road the Romans had driven west from Bravinium into the border hills. By the time he had reached Nant Goidel the sun was

up. The wide valley of Teme lay beneath him milkily veiled. It was odd, he thought, that he had not noticed the mist when he walked through it: only the chill of the morning air. Perhaps it came from the drinking up of the dews. He felt drowsy now: he had kept awake all night to make sure of being awake before his father. He found an old barn full of cut bracken and fell asleep. That smell, too, remained with him.

The rumbling of wheels and a sound of voices woke him. The cart with the beer-barrels had arrived. From his holt inside the barn he watched them unharness the horses and lower the shafts. There was a great discussion as to whether the uphill jolt had clouded the beer, and the two drivers decided to settle the question by broaching the casks. A gentleman on a stiff cob rode up and accepted a drink. Johnny knew him for Mr. Malpas, the Marquess's agent: he put up a pair of field-glasses to his eyes and swept the great bowed horizons.

"Yes . . . They're coming down from the north and the west," he said. "They're not hurrying them: that's the right way. It looks like a good drive. I can count up to fifty from here. H'm, I'm glad I'm in time. I thought they'd be later than this." He looked at his watch: "Twelve-twenty, damn it. No wonder I had a thirst on me!"

"Twelve-twenty," Johnny thought. "I must have slept more than six hours."

They were coming down from the north and the

west. His eyes searched the hills. On the north he could see them: first of all a wide crescent of moving dots on the skyline—the drivers; below these a larger number of smaller shapes in clusters—the troops of ponies. The driven beasts grazed as they went, starting forward from time to time as they caught the wind of the men moving down behind them, and as it moved downward the crescent of horsemen drew its horns inward, like the claws of a scorpion closing. Now they had reached the last broken wall that divided open moorland from fields enclosed. The huddled ponies hesitated, scenting danger in the stone barrier in front of them, the crescent of horsemen always advancing from behind. It was a ticklish moment that might easily have ended in a sudden stampede uphill and the morning's work lost. The riders halted; moved forward cautiously, a few yards at a time. Then the foremost pony made up his mind. He advanced through the gap in the wall, and the others meekly trotted in after him.

The rest was easy. When once they were in a walled field there was nothing for the ponies to do but follow the line of least resistance. As the following horsemen triumphantly closed in on them they gathered in a timid bunch and came cantering down the hill through an open gate and into the folds. There must have been seventy of all shapes and sizes: old mares with brambles caught in their tufted coats; long-legged foals that trotted close to their mothers' quarters;

wild-eyed stallions that threw up their heads and whinnied and stamped. Some were black, some mousy, some tawny or buff as dead bracken; some shaggy, some sleek, yet all, in a certain degree, assimilated to the hues of the hills. And the men who had driven them in since dawn resembled them in this kind of protective coloration: their moleskins and homespuns were faded—even the blacks had gone green as dark lichen and their shaggy, weathered faces were heather-brown. Now all the air grew thick with dust and the smell of horse-flesh. The farmers moved amid it laughing and joking together; their dogs snarled at each other or fought. The press in the farmyard was so thick that at last Johnny thought it safe to emerge from his hiding-place. Dai Prosser recognized him and pulled a face at him; but his father's eyes were luckily too deeply engrossed in the folded ponies to notice him.

There was no time to be lost. Already the second drive was descending the slopes to westward. The men gathered round the fold identifying their ponies—by here a white star or stocking and there an odd freak of colour. The eyes of the agent were on them and disputes were infrequent: quarrels would not break out till his back was turned and the beer began to flow. Inside the fold the ponies stood huddled, bewildered and meek. Only one showed spirit, a sleek and fiery black stallion that snorted and stamped and whinnied from time to time, lashing out fiercely when-

ever another came within reach of his hooves. Although he had not been hard driven his coat was streaked with sweat and spattered with foam. As he stood there, trembling with impotent anger, one could see the ripple of tense muscle beneath his sleek skin.

"That there beggar's a proper devil," somebody said. "Whose is he, Aaron?"

"One of them rogues as wanders about fighting all that comes for the mares."

"He be none of mine, anyhow," said another. "And if so be as he was I'd sooner be quit of him. I reckon his lordship can have him and welcome. What d'you say, Mr. Malpas?"

The agent laughed: "Would you like to bring him down for me? I'll give you ten shillings if you do."

"Ten shillings? I wouldn't go nigh that beggar's heels, not for five pound!"

"Ay, he's more in Matt Bradley's line than yours," another chuckled slyly. "And I bet a pound Matt wouldn't master him."

"What's that you're saying? Who's using my name over there?"

Johnny heard his father's rasping voice. Matthew Bradley raised himself from the wall on which he had been leaning. He stood up magnificently, overtopping the crowd, surveying it with hot, contemptuous eyes. He took out a sovereign and spun it in the air. "Who's betting against me?" he growled. "Come on, then.

Put your money down! First come, first served."

The friends of the man who had spoken rallied him. "Come on, Harry. That's good enough. Let's see the colour of your money!"

"I'm not paying to see a chap killed," said the other sullenly.

The agent spoke with his pipe in his teeth. "I tell you what, Bradley. I'll give you two pound if you'll break that brute inside two months and ride him down to the Castle. Is that a bargain?"

"Make it a month, Mr. Malpas—and I'll pay you five pound if I don't."

"I don't want your money, Bradley; but I like the looks of the pony."

Matthew Bradley nodded and stripped off his coat. "Give us a halter," he said. Someone thrust a frayed rope into his hands. He vaulted lightly on to the wall of the fold; he straddled it and dropped down. Johnny held his breath: he had never before felt so proud of his father's daring and strength; and indeed it was entrancing to see the confident ease with which he threaded the packed concourse of frightened animals; his hands, brushing their coats as he passed, seemed to soothe them rather than alarm them; not even the most timid foals were disturbed as he made his way through them. He passed on and on until he reached the open space which the lashing hooves of the black stallion had cleared. He looked at the horse: the horse looked at him, its head turned

sideways, and shivered. There was the tensility of a coiled spring in the beast's taut muscles.

"Slip a snitch on him, Matt, or he'll have you. See that lip going up!" a man shouted.

Matthew Bradley turned slowly and smiled at him, a proud, mocking smile. He held the rope coiled in his hands. His movement was almost dreamy and casual in its lack of purpose as he tossed the loop over the pony's head in a cast that was perfectly judged. With a powerful snatch—there was nothing casual now—he pulled the loop tight. The stallion squealed and shot up straight in the air to the end of the tether. He seemed rather a creature of air than of earth as the up-lifted front hooves slashed the space where, an instant before, Matt Bradley had stood. His ugly mouth gaped wide open, the yellow teeth bared ready to tear his tormentor. And no sooner had he touched the earth than up he sprang again in a cloud of dust, sideways, this time, towards the huddled mass of the other ponies. The brown mass of horse-flesh swayed as they pressed closer together, struggling to keep their feet. Again the rope tightened, bringing the stallion up with a jerk; again he shot up into the air, wildly shaking his head. Matthew Bradley was leaning backward, his heels dug into the dust, his whole weight sustained by the pull of the rope. When the pony came down, the rope slackened. The man slipped backwards and fell. "Look out, Matt," somebody shouted, "the beggar's coming for you!" Almost too

late: as the stallion charged, head downward, Matthew Bradley rolled sideways out of its track and somehow scrambled to his feet, as the angry beast hurtled past and crashed into the wall of the fold. The men who were standing behind it scattered. The others laughed at them. Matthew Bradley still had the rope; he had twisted it round his arm to make sure of keeping it. But now it hung slack; the stallion sulked: perhaps his crash into the wall had bruised and sobered him. Only the continued tremor of the muscles in his shoulders betrayed his agitation. He put down his head to crop a tuft of grass that had grown in the dust. It was as though, for the moment, he had forgotten his enemy's existence. Matthew Bradley watched him, smiling. He himself breathed heavily; his figure was dusted from head to foot, his sanguine face streaked with sweat.

"You've got him now, Matt," a voice said. "Them two sovereigns be as good as yours." But he appeared not to hear it. He twitched the rope gently: the black stallion lifted its head, a wisp of grass unswallowed between his velvety lips. The man and the horse regarded each other as it were solemnly. Matthew gently tightened the rope, then gradually put on pressure. The animal tossed its head and snorted. As the man pulled more strongly, it dug in its four hooves and resisted the pull. It was a contest of weight and sheer strength—the strength of the horse, the strength of the man—above all, the strength of the rope whose

frayed strands twirled in the air as it took the strain: it was now a question of which of the three would break first. The men on the wall were silent watching the struggle. They watched the rope spin. It had cut into Bradley's wrist. His right hand looked purple and swollen, but he seemed not to care. They watched the beast's straining quarters on which the surface muscles stood out in hard smooth folds. They saw that the throttling pressure on its neck had begun to tell, for once it lifted its front feet and the hinder slid forward, slightly giving ground. The muscles of the quarters relaxed; then suddenly stiffened, gathering for a leap. The black body was launched through the air, dragging Bradley after it. Round and round it swirled kicking and screaming in a cloud of dust, no longer bent on destruction, only on escape. Bradley used his brains and his feet; wherever the terrified animal plunged, he kept the rope taut. The man, the beast and the rope between them spun round in a piece like one black tornado.

And then the rope snapped . . .

At that moment Bradley stood between his opponent and safety in its fellows' company. One instant only the mad thing hesitated, bewildered by a sudden freedom that seemed too good to be true. Then it shot through the air like a projectile. Bradley saw it coming and stooped, a twentieth of a second too late. He put up his hands to protect his head, but one flying hoof caught it. His skull cracked like an egg. He

pitched over without a cry and lay limp. Men were scrambling over the fold wall, running to lift him, while the black stallion, swishing tail, stood in front of the other ponies and gazed at them mildly. Matthew Bradley died in the cart that carried him home.

(IV)

Dr. Bradley remembered the day of his father's funeral because it was the first he had ever been to. He had attended so many hundreds since then (he never, if he could help it, failed to follow the patients he lost) that the events of the funeral itself were not particularly distinct. What he did remember now, with an uncanny exactness, was the sound of the tenor bell tolling, all day long as it seemed, which filled the white, veiled sky with its melancholy vibrations, and an odd sense of stillness rather than emptiness which possessed the house as soon as the tolling ceased.

After that day had passed, his life went on much as before. He still went daily to school and enjoyed it: Mr. Laxton, the schoolmaster, had let him off the licking he had earned, while the sensational nature of his bereavement had made him more important. At midday he came home to dinner, there was certainly less to eat: when his father was at home there had always been meat on the table. During the day his mother was generally busy with her needle at work on

the charitable commissions folk kindly gave her. She was as quiet as ever, and did not seem over-harassed. It was not until many years later that he came to realize how hard pressed the poor woman must have been to satisfy a schoolboy's voracious appetite. He knew vaguely, about this time, that Mr. Laxton and she between them were planning to settle him in some job which, if it did nothing else, would keep him out of mischief and find him his keep; yet the job, when he got it, had nothing to do with their scheming.

The offer of it came quite spontaneously from old "Dr." Mortimore, the bone-setter. "Dr." Mortimore lived in a small dark house, with a stable at the back, half-way down the village street and opposite the pink-washed cottage. Until a few years before Johnny's birth, when the various examining bodies who granted medical degrees and diplomas decided that the public (and they themselves) were in need of protection and put through the General Medical Council Act of Eighteen Fifty-Eight, Jabez Mortimore had always frankly called himself "Doctor." Even now, though the law denied him the use of that title, the people of Lesswardine continued to give it him. He was a very old man, though not, perhaps, quite so old as his stories suggested. It was said that he had sailed as a surgeon's mate in the *Victory* and had stood by on her quarter-deck, raked by the *Redoubtable's* fighting-tops while his chief dressed Lord Nelson's wound; and though it seemed to his opponents unlikely that he

could have become a surgeon's mate in his early 'teens, there was no doubt that he had served with his idol Cochrane in the Chilean navy and gained a smattering of Spanish and lost a leg during the Chilean revolt.

His origins were mysterious; but he had lived so long in Lesswardine that few people ever troubled to question them. Some said he had been a butcher-boy in Dublin and that this experience accounted for his skill with the knife. For himself, he claimed to be the last living descendant of those great Marcher Lords, the Mortimers of Wigmore Castle. Whatever his history or descent may have been, he was certainly a man of remarkable character, cunning and intelligent. There was no physical emergency in the life of man or beast to which Jabez Mortimore was not prepared to apply his skill. He could charm away children's warts and dissipate ponies' windgalls. He could set a broken wrist or fire a spavin. He was equally ready to puncture blown sheep or tap human dropsies; to procure or avert abortions. Though his methods were needlessly savage, and included the frequent use of actual cautery and the exhibition of draughts of a strength that would stagger a cart-horse, folk who suffered these torments agreed, at least, that they had something for their money, and that his treatment, if it were painful, was certainly not expectant.

And, such was the force of his confident personality and so potent the power of suggestion in most human ailments, that many who ran to him as a last resort,

having been "given up"—as the saying is—by practitioners with strings of cryptic initials after their names; were miraculously shocked or frightened into recovery. When he failed, as no doubt he often did, he could generally convince his patients that the fault was not his. Things might have gone better, he said, if they had only let him handle their cases from the start: a contention which, in the nature of things, was unanswerable. And, charlatan though he was, he did cure hopeless cases. Of this there was no doubt. He cured them by virtue of an unusual amount of common sense (which is the better part of all medical science); by a vast store of observed experience, ruthlessly acquired; by a courage that shrank at nothing, and by the possession of hands endowed with unusual sensitiveness in manipulation and strength well-nigh superhuman.

Johnny Bradley had known the bone-setter by sight for as long as he could remember. "Dr." Mortimore, in fact, was one of the outstanding spectacles of life in Lesswardine: a wiry, shrunken figure muffled to the chin in an old-fashioned frieze coat with a shoulder-cape. He wore a wide-brimmed beaver hat crammed down on a forehead that bulged above either eyebrow, and which was so enormous compared with the rest of his features that his head, in spite of the bushy white beard, resembled those heads of foetuses dangling in bottles of spirit which, with other gruesome anatomical specimens, made a sinister background to the dark

witch's kitchen in which he conducted his practice. On most days of the year, and always in the same attire, he drove out in a small weather-beaten dog-cart, drawn by a shaggy pony. He was often, like Matthew Bradley, away for a week at a time, selling herbal concoctions and manipulating stiff joints down the whole length of the Radnor March.

He lived quite alone. Though his age and his reputation robbed the adventure of moral perils, no Lesswardine woman would have dared to enter his house alone. At the time of Matt Bradley's death he was probably beginning to feel the effects of advancing age and needed some help. That, perhaps, was why, one day when Johnny was passing, he stumped out and caught him by the ear and lugged him into his sinister house.

"You're Matt Bradley's boy, aren't you?" he grunted. "Ha . . . anyone might have guessed that from your ugly black mug! You've the spit of his mouth—no doubt of the sire at any rate. How old are you, ha?"

"Fourteen, doctor."

"Fourteen, ha? And still at school! Why, when I was fourteen I'd doubled the Horn three times. D'you know what the Horn is? Never heard of it, ha? That shows what this schooling nonsense is worth. Well, I want a lad. I want a lad to tidy up things in the house and keep the place clean and wash bottles and clean the instruments—ha?—and chop wood and light

fires and cook for me. I want a lad that can keep his mouth shut and his eyes open, ha? You look strong for your age. You'll do. Two shillings a week and your dinner when there is any. Start to-morrow, ha? Tell your mother that you've been hired."

It was hard to measure the precise motives that lay behind the old man's offer. No doubt he did feel the need of some help—the appalling squalor and confusion of his house vouched for that. Looking backward, John Bradley could not help feeling there may have been something else in it. The loneliness of old age (he knew all about that), and perhaps, even more, a sudden impulse of charity—the spontaneous desire to be kind to the son of a man who had had something in common with himself, whom he had welcomed, in a tame and timid world, as a brother outlaw, a fellow buccaneer.

This was precisely the aspect of the bone-setter's character that scared Mrs. Bradley. She was already disturbed by the boy's physical resemblance to his father. He was as wild as a hawk, and it seemed to her that the last thing likely to tame him was the influence of this lawless old man. She found herself torn between these fears and the welcome prospect of even a little relief from her financial difficulties. The poor woman felt she was hardly competent to make by herself a decision that might affect his future so gravely. He could see her sitting there in the kitchen one evening—it was autumn now and the days had

begun to shorten—her hands nervously clasped over the neglected sewing in her lap, her eyes looking into the fire: Mr. Laxton, the schoolmaster, perched nervously on the very edge of a rickety kitchen chair, while he himself, an ungainly, black-browed boy, stood glowering between them. Mr. Laxton had hoped, he said, to settle Johnny in some respectable trade or as clerk in the office of some professional man. He was the sharpest boy in the school when he chose to concentrate, and qualified, if he might say so, by the polite influences of his home to aspire to something better than becoming a bone-setter's bottle-washer.

"I have nothing to say against Dr. Mortimore personally," he said. "I refuse to believe the things that are said against him. Still, it does seem a waste, Mrs. Bradley. It does seem a waste."

Johnny's mother shook her head. "We must both of us find work of some kind," she said; "we can't live on air. My husband, as you know, was neither wealthy nor provident. Nothing else has suggested itself so far, unless . . . Well, there are certain things I would rather not speak of, Mr. Laxton: let me leave it at that. Beggars can't be choosers, you know."

Mr. Laxton shook his head too, and stroked his thin, silky beard. Damp wood in the fire hissed maliciously, mocking their silence. Then Johnny himself spoke suddenly:

"I want to work, Mother," he said, "and I'm going to work. I told Dr. Mortimore as I'd go to him, and

go I will, no matter what any of you say. And I don't care who speaks against him either. I like Dr. Mortimore. • So there!"

There was more in this sudden determination than either of them guessed. Of late he had not been happy with his mother. Never after that far-off night when she had danced like an in-blown moth in the candle-light had he felt really at home with her. Since then, it seemed, she had never opened her heart to him. Though she smiled and was kind, her silence defeated him; he could not get near her. Sometimes when his noisy entrance broke in on her secret thoughts she would look strangely, as though she took him for a changeling and could not believe him her own. Since his father's death she had become even more remote and withdrawn from the passionate sympathy he wanted to give her. He could not understand her. And there was something more: a thing that had lately filled his heart with jealous misery.

One evening—it could not have been more than a month or six weeks after Matt Bradley's funeral—he had come home from school to find a strange trap: a smart gig with silver mountings, and a big bay that took the eye, tied up at the garden gate. As he entered the porch he heard his mother laughing and talking with a high-pitched excitement new to his ears. When she heard the clump of his boots she stopped short. In the midst of an awkward silence he entered the room. On the edge of the kitchen table, swinging

his legs, sat a stranger whose clothes matched the smartness of the trap in the lane: a young-middle-aged man, with a pale face and carefully-groomed whiskers. Johnny noticed the cut of his trousers, which was fashionably tight, the brilliance of his varnished boots, in which reflected flames flickered; the opulence of the gold "Albert" that spanned his waistcoat; the signet that flashed on one finger of his small white hand. He hated this concatenation of elegance at sight; he hated more the frank but somewhat contemptuous stare with which their owner surveyed him.

"So this is the boy?" the stranger asked.

"Yes, this is Johnny," his mother answered hurriedly. "Shake hands with Mr. Delahay, Johnny," she said. "He's an old friend of mine—a very old friend—who has kindly come to see me."

"Kindly, kindly, Lavinia? You shouldn't put it like that. No, really you shouldn't."

He held out his right hand, on which there was a glove, and permitted Johnny to shake it. It was a nonchalant, supercilious handclasp. He continued to contemplate the boy from head to foot with obvious distaste.

"Your boy. Well, well, who would have thought it!" he said.

"He's enormously big for his age, Walter. You see, he takes after his father," she added defensively. "It's an awkward age."

John Bradley felt himself going red with humilia-

tion and anger. She was making excuses for him, ashamed of him, trying to explain him away! He was as angry with her as with the elegant stranger who went on swinging his varnished boots and smiling, with a glance of concern at the glove which had been contaminated by Johnny's hand. The boy's angry hatred boiled up into words:

"Yes, I take after my father," he said. "And if my father was here and saw you sitting on the table like that he'd know how to use you. He'd lift you up by the scruff of the neck and boot you out pretty quick, whoever you are!"

"Johnny, Johnny! What are you saying? How dare you?" his mother cried. "How dare you insult my friends, you bad, wicked boy? You must have gone mad. . ."

He had turned his back on them; he made for the door, and slammed it savagely. He would not wait to hear what she said; her words faded behind him. From behind the closed door he heard a man's laughter. The stranger was treating him as a joke, and he couldn't stop him—not unless he did what he'd said his father would do, and, big and strong as he was, he knew he couldn't. At the gate a fierce impulse seized him to untie the horse and drive it away: he liked to think of those varnished boots tramping through mud in pursuit of it. But that, as he told himself, was a poor kind of spite and would do him no good. There was nothing conceivable that could do

him any good or assuage the furious hatred and jealousy that tormented him. He would never forgive her, never! She had been ashamed of him. It was more reasonable that he should have been ashamed of her: a young widow who had rich, middle-aged gentlemen to visit her. He would not be the only one who had seen the silver-mounted trap in the lane; it wouldn't be long before the whole village knew about it and started sniggering—not only at her but at him.

"She ought to have known better," he told himself. "She ought to have known better."

He went down to the river and listened to the big trout plopping in deep holes under the alders. The mayfly was over now, and they only rose at night. The sky darkened and the rise stopped. The air grew suddenly cold. The surface of the pools lay still and smooth as ebony; only a murmur of distant stickles told him the river still flowed. A huge owl, pale in faint starlight, flew out of the trees; an otter whistled upstream. How he remembered that hungry, miserable night!

He had determined not to go home until it was so late that his mother must surely have gone to bed; but when, well after ten o'clock, he approached the house, a light still burned in the kitchen. She was sitting close to the fire, engrossed in her sewing. Her white hand flickered to and fro; the deft needle shone in her fingers. For a moment she took no heed of him but went on sewing. For a moment he, too, shocked by

seeing her there, hesitated. As he crossed to the stairs, without speaking, she raised her eyes. They looked hurt and reproachful. He guessed that she had been crying. He was not sorry. She spoke sharply: "Johnny!"

"Yes, Mother?"

"You have behaved disgracefully, abominably. I hope you realize it." He did not answer her. "Your supper's there on the table," she said.

"I don't want any supper," he answered roughly, although he felt starving. He went upstairs to bed.

(v)

But it was never the same after that. It never, he told himself, could be the same. The memory of what had happened that afternoon was a barrier between them. Pride on her side, on his the smoulder of an unforgivable humiliation fanned by gusts of a fierce instinctive jealousy deeper than reason, prevented their meeting. And of course the village did talk. Mr. Delahay of Trewern in the Forest was courting Matt Bradley's widow. What his "intentions" were folk didn't presume to decide, but, knowing what human nature was, they could make a pretty fair guess. Mrs. Bradley had let it be known that Mr. Delahay was no new acquaintance but a friend of her girlhood. That, quite possibly, might be true. Nobody knew where

Matt Bradley had picked her up—or she him, as seemed more probable; she was certainly a cut above him, and the gentry had the habit of gadding about the country instead of biding where they were born, like working people; while the excuse that Mr. Delahay had known her when she was a girl made no difference to the fact that the trap with the silver mountings stood waiting in the lane far too often for respectability. It was hard on that boy of Matt's, they said, to be tied to a mother who behaved herself that brazen outrageous. People might carry on that way—and did, no doubt, in towns, but not in villages, and certainly not in Lesswardine!

The backwash of this current of whispers reached him when he had started working for old "Dr." Mortimore and hardened his heart. His job kept him sometimes busy and always interested. There were elements of the macabre in it which were equally terrifying and fascinating: not merely the row of spirit-bottled manikins, the origin and history of each of which he came in time to know, but a charnel-house of anatomical specimens that ranged from such minor veterinary oddities as the paws of a seven-toed cat and a two-headed calf to a complete articulated human skeleton which, dangling from a beam, supplied the proper keynote to his witch's kitchen. "Dr." Mortimore called this terror Captain Kidd, or sometimes, familiarly, William. In his lonelier days he had got into the way of talking to it—

before Johnny came, he said, he had nobody else to talk to—and the habit was so ingrained that even now Captain Kidd made a silent third in their conversations, a presence so real and active that sometimes Johnny almost expected a voice to issue from between the death's-head's grinning jaws. The presence of this skeleton at their somewhat haphazard feasts—the old man insisted on taking his meals in its presence—was sufficiently disconcerting; but an experience which, at first, he found even fuller of horror was his duty, the last of the day, of taking off "Dr." Mortimore's wooden leg and, first of the morning, fitting it on again. Before Johnny came he had always gone to bed with it, being too stiff in the loins to undo and re-buckle the straps. He had a name for that too; Miss Kilmansegg he called it. Johnny never knew why until many years afterwards.

That dark little house, in fact, was as densely crammed with unclassified curious rubbish as the vaults of a neglected museum. "Dr." Mortimore was possessed by a jackdaw acquisitiveness for all sorts of junk. He had begun to collect such things in his seafaring days—shells, carvings, weapons, totems, primitive pottery—and even now, when a curio took his fancy at a sale or in a shop-window he would lust after it and carry it home. He could never set eyes on a bone without wanting to possess it. The whole house was cluttered with a silt of such things acquired and forgotten, until, of a sudden, it entered his head that

some precious fragment had been mislaid—and Johnny must go down on his hands and knees scrabbling like an excavator, or fetch in a pair of steps and search the dust of spider-infested shelves. He had never guessed there were so many spiders in the world as had their dark abode in "Dr." Mortimore's house. And he hated spiders mortally. The mere touch of a web sent a shiver down his spine. He remembered those agonies almost more clearly than anything else.

Yet this junk accounted for no more than a quarter of the house's Augean congestion. "Dr." Mortimore bought books as well—though never a new one: odd parcels of books at sales, dusty volumes picked up almost haphazard at rag-markets. In his earlier days he had been what is called "a great reader." Now, partly because of his failing sight, yet even more because his old brain had lost its power of concentration, he no longer read, though he sometimes made Johnny read aloud to him. But he still bought books. He could never resist a bargain; and he liked the smell of calf and old printed paper for itself. Again and again he would bring back a trap-full and sit—not reading but just gloating over his purchase.

The results of this passion became the most important influence in John Bradley's life. Up till now his acquaintance with books had been limited to the schoolroom. In his own home there had been none but a Bible, in minute print, that lay at his mother's bedside. On the first floor at "Dr." Mortimore's there

was a back bedroom crammed with dusty piles of them, and a sort of loft opening out of it, equally full. When the bone-setter jogged off on his journeys and left Johnny behind in charge of the house, the boy spent most of his time in exploring these unknown territories of wonder. A new world of interest and knowledge opened before him, embarrassing in its richness and variety of experience. He sat on the floor of those ill-lit, dusty chambers hour after hour, his brooding eyes greedily fixed on the pages till light failed and the print grew dim. He became, by degrees, through mere, unconscious absorption, not cultured or "educated" but literate, familiar with the sound and the usage of words (and even of the ideas they connoted) which had no place in a rustic vocabulary. He read without method, without any purpose save that of reading. He read, as it were, against time, deliberately skipping or abandoning any book that failed to fire his imagination. And there were plenty of these: volumes of eighteenth-century sermons and theological learning that had only found themselves there through being tied up in a parcel with others to make a "lot" at a sale; mathematical textbooks, their pages sprinkled with algebraic equations; books in foreign languages, living and dead, which were equally unintelligible; sets of novels, published in paper-backed monthly parts, which, because they contributed nothing to his thirst for knowledge, he discarded at a glance; long-forgotten epics and effusions of minor poetry,

which he rejected, along with others that were inspired and prophetic, because the inversions troubled him, because the magnificence of high-sounding archaic words that he did not know intimidated him and, stumbling as he did, he missed the enchantment of rhythm: this was a form of speech that he could not grasp, so he let it go.

What he fell upon, with a more inquisitive delight, was books of history, geography and travel. "Dr." Mortimore had awakened this curiosity by the tales of adventurous voyaging with which his talk was salted. One of the first of such treasures on which John Bradley chanced was Hakluyt's *Divers Voyages*, whose presence in this limbo of print was not altogether astonishing since the great geographer was, in fact, a Herefordshire man, having been born on the banks of the Lugg, not twenty miles from Lesswardine. To a boy whose whole world had up to this time been bounded by the sombre contours of the Shropshire and Radnor hills, these adventure stories opened up vistas of endless expanses of glittering sea and sun-swept prairie. His imagination clutched at this new-found freedom and made it momentarily his own. After Hakluyt he chanced on Johnson's highly-coloured *History of the Pyrates*, a book to which a moving actuality was added by the presence, in the room beneath him, of that suspended skeleton which, after his reading, he felt forced to treat with greater respect and even with friendliness. At that time—though he could not imagine how "Dr."

Mortimore had come by them—his literal mind accepted the theory that those bones were actually all that was left of Kidd. As to his other former terror, Miss Kilmansegg, his literary researches left him no wiser.

They did, in fact, bear on the science of Anatomy. Though he affected to scorn their contents, "Dr." Mortimore never neglected the chance of a bargain in medical textbooks. Out of the alluvial silt in the back bedroom it would have been possible to excavate a considerable library of books dealing with obsolete medical and surgical theory and practice. There was not one of them that had been published since the date of his birth: but John Bradley fed, with an omnivorous appetite, on anything that might illumine the mysteries of "Dr." Mortimore's calling, which, as soon as he set foot in the house, he had been ambitious to follow.

A large part of the time he spent alone in the cluttered back bedroom was devoted to researches of this kind among products of that twilit age in which medicine still groped its way through a fog of empiricism, the last shreds of medieval magic. Mead's *Treatise on The Power of the Sun and Moon over Human Bodies* carried with him an equally authority (that of the printed word) to that of a translation of Harvey's tract *On the Circulation of the Blood*, and no more than that of Brown's Classification of all diseases into "sthenic" and "asthenic" (blessed words of mystery!) or of the principles laid down by Cullen

in his *Practice of Physic*. He read them all; his young brain, in which nothing but purely sensual experience had been stored, absorbed and retained them with an indiscriminating eagerness that took no account of their contradictions.

The "doctor" encouraged this passion. He knew that a time was at hand when increasing physical disability and fatigue would compel him to give up the more strenuous part of his practice. Though he spent little of his earnings on anything but his precious and irresistible junk, and the house was his own, he was aware of his age and haunted by the prospect of having to live on his savings. He knew he had made an even better bargain than he had anticipated when he acquired Johnny Bradley's services, and lost no time before beginning to train him as an assistant and probable successor.

"Your books are all very well," he would say, "and I won't set you against them; but it's not by reading words or looking at pictures that you'll learn to follow me, ha? It's by using your eyes and your hands and listening to what I tell you. There's things I know that have never been written in books and never will be—things I couldn't put down in writing myself, not even if I tried. When a man comes for me to help him, what do I do? I have a good look at him first. I say to myself: 'Now, doctor,' I says, 'what sort of a beggar is this, ha? Is he scared to death or only a bit uneasy? Is he going to hide what he's scared of or

speak out straight? Does he think I'm going to cure him of what he's got wrong, or has he come just because someone's told him to come, with his tongue in his cheek? Is he wanting to hear the truth or be put off with a story? If I give him a draught to blow out his guts, will he take it or pour it straight down a drain? And this arm or leg of his which he says he can't straighten, does he want it put straight or would he rather I gave up the job—like the other doctors have done—to give him an excuse to drop work and sit by the fire and snap at his missus or limp about Lesswardine asking for other folks' sympathy?' Those are some of the questions I ask myself, ha? And, by thunder, I get some queer answers!

"Then there's hands. Look at mine!" He stretched out his bony fingers and pulled up his sleeve. Beneath the shrunken tattooed skin of the forearm the fatless muscles and tendons revealed the definition of an anatomical plate depicting an arm with the skin reflected; the muscles in the ball of his thumb, as he contracted them, bulged out like a tennis ball. "Both hands, mind: the one won't serve you, ha? When I had my strength I could pick up a poker and twist it. Many's the time I've done that at fairs to make the strong man look silly. You've got to have strength; but there's more in these hands than strength, more than what you can see. There's touch. That's a thing that's born with a man, though I don't say but what he can learn. When you put your hands round a wrist j'int

or a knee or an ankle blindfold—ay, *or* on a horse's fetlock or pastern or coffin-j'int—you ought to know by the touch of it what's underneath, just as if the flesh and sinews and that wasn't there . . . ay, and when you lay your hands on their bosoms or necks or bellies, for that matter. And what does that mean? I ask you what does that signify, ha? I'll tell you, my lad, what it signifies. It signifies bones! Now put by your books and take a turn at the Captain. There's naught wrong with *his* bones; they feel the same as they ought to. Close your eyes, my lad, and run your hands over Kidd's ankle. Keep your mind, now, on what it feels like and never forget it as long as you live. If a living ankle don't feel like what you've remembered, you'll know there's summat amiss with it, ha? And if you use what brains you've got and find out what's different, well, that's what's amiss. What next—ha? What next? That's where strength comes on. I said strength, mind, not vi'lence. You've got to mould that there j'int with your fingers—ha?—until it feels like the Captain's. You get to know Captain Kidd, my lad, and he'll see you through. That's all you'll ever need to know about j'int, whatever the doctors may tell you. If there's nothing wrong with the bones, you leave 'em be—partic'lar if they feel hot. There's Touch again, ha? Never you play with a heated j'int, however tempted, in horse or man or child.

"I'll tell you how I came to know about bones," the old man went on. (He told the story often, for-

enclosures that passed for fields in that blighted landscape lay scabrous with cindery patches on which no green could ever spring, and such grass as there was (if grass it were) in the spaces between, had not the light of a living green.

Many buildings with tapered smoke-stacks loomed out of the haze: some gaunt and seemingly deserted; others faintly illuminated by lines of lighted windows; others again inhabited, as it seemed, by solitary monsters that thrust out titanic arms to turn a huge wheel—the beam-engines which, in those days, pumped water out of drowned workings to fill the canals, and drove the drums of the winding-gear whose snaky cables ran over the spinning wheels of the headgear and raised coal from the pits. Day and night the beam-engines slowly plunged and withdrew their gigantic arms; in the dark galleries underground night and day were one and work never ceased.

Through the gathering dusk this manifestation of power appeared to John Bradley oddly sombre and even sinister. Only a faint luminosity shone from the engine-house windows; the slow human figures that moved about the pit-heads were few. Apart from the circling wheels that topped the tall headgear and the burning slack which, like flame-licked deposits of soot on a fire-back, laced the slopes of the mountainous spoil-banks with serpentine coruscations, one might have thought all these smaller outlying collieries abandoned—as indeed they soon would be. There

seemed to be more life even in the lines of smouldering brick-kilns whose stoking ports glimmered through their own lurid smoke displaying the huge pyramids of bricks they had baked; and when these were left behind there appeared a new zone of volcanic activity so intense that the smoke-veiled sky was no longer black but tawny. He saw ranges of black-roofed sheds with open sides—the forges where red bars and ingots, smitten by thudding hammers, burst into a fountain-spray of fiery particles; he saw steel-works where molten metal gushed in a white-hot cascade from the converter's vent, outlining against its fierce incandescence black human forms which seemed as though they must surely shrivel like the wicked in hell; he saw, more magnificent than all these tartarean splendours, tall furnace-towers, resembling the monuments of some barbarous phallic cult, which, shrouded in darkness one moment, at the next stood revealed in their swart majesty, through layers of air that rose quivering in the heat of the puddling-beds into which the flux of their contents ran, or suddenly, when their black throats were opened and the blast, released, roared upward, erupted into tongues and pillars of flame that showed the surrounding waste in all its mournful vastness.

Through that fiery belt the slow train wound its way with stumbling hesitations, abrupt halts and impatient shrieks of the whistle which the dense air appeared to absorb or reject. Long strings of trucks

laden with coal and ballast or huge, hooded shapes of machinery clanked and thundered past. The passenger-train seemed a poor, lost thing, timidly feeling its way into the congested terminus, till, all of a sudden, the engine stuttered, the couplings jolted, the carriages jerked forward. Gathering speed for a finish they seemed to be plunging downward into the earth itself. The black throat of a tunnel swallowed them, choked them. Out of a rumbling darkness shot with streaming sparks, they emerged into the echoing glass-roofed cylinder of the Great Western Station.

John Bradley had never set foot on the pavements of a great industrial city before. In later life he was to take North Bromwich for granted—as a familiar face which, though age may change its features, remains always essentially the same. He was to see hotels and office buildings of flamboyant Victorian Gothic displace the sober Georgian façades that Dr. Johnson and Baskerville and the exiled Priestley had known. He was to see the dim, discreet streets of the city centre, with their symmetrical globular gas-lamps, illumined by sputtering arcs and garish with neon lights and sky-signs; the cobbled roadway ripped up and replaced by tar-sprayed macadam and smooth wood pavements. He was to see the double-decked horse-drawn omnibuses, with their romantic suggestion of stage-coaches, give way to steam-trams whose engines vomited volumes of gritty smoke, to cable-trams propelled by endless wire-ropes, to electric-trams whose trolley-

wheels screamed as they took a curve: he was to see each of these acclaimed in succession as the last word in public transport, and each in turn scrapped,² until the rubber-tyred, smooth-running motor-bus restored the ever more crowded streets to something approaching their former quietude. Yet the vision of North Bromwich that remained with him as basic and essential was that on which his countryman's eyes seized so greedily as he stepped out into Sackville Row that night, with his packing-case on his shoulder.

He would never have maintained, he reflected now, that North Bromwich was a beautiful city. Yet his first impression of it, as he remembered, had been one of grace as well as grandeur—above all, of spaciousness. Sackville Row itself was at least four times as wide as the village street at Lesswardine, and that feeling of spaciousness was enhanced by the fact that its southern side was bordered not by a second row of houses but by a line of massive railings like heavy spears, protecting an ancient graveyard thickset with carved urns and obelisks and other memorials of the Georgian dead, from the midst of which there rose into the misty autumnal dusk the ornate sandstone cupola of the church in which they had worshipped, a shape of classical beauty dreamily poised above the dark city.

It was the airy grace of this dome, as compared with the homely solidity of the church-tower at Lesswardine, that first brought to his mind the difference

between the simplicities of the rustic life he had left and the more formal civilization that awaited him. This Italianate building and, a hundred yards farther on, the Town Hall (a Corinthian temple whose mighty columns of Anglesea marble smoke had already blackened) and the tremendous limestone bulk of the Renaissance Council House and Art Gallery (as yet barely completed and looming white through the faint haze) were always to remain for him the symbols of the city's majesty. When he spoke of North Bromwich, theirs were the first representative shapes that came to him—those vast shapes and the sonorous vibrations of the clock in the new Art Gallery tower which, that evening, as he put down his packing-case on the pavement and stared up at its illuminated disc, solemnly boomed forth the hour of seven.

That great bell, whose monitory deliberateness in the striking of each hour seemed to emphasize not merely the passage of time but its grim irrevocableness, became, for the next five years the dictator of John Bradley's existence. Only the bulk of the Town Hall and the width of two streets separated the campanile from the Prince's College in which, with a fury of application, he set himself to the task of making up for lost time. At first, indeed, it seemed as though the whole of his life up to that moment had been wasted. That same Act of Parliament which had abolished the system of apprenticeship had decreed that a medical student, before registration, must first

pass an examination in General Knowledge, and for this Mr. Laxton's elementary curriculum had not equipped him. He was older by several years than most of the students who entered the College with him, and yet far behind them in the scope of their education.

Not behind them in everything. In the hard matter of living, in acquaintance with human nature, in adaptability, he found most of them strangely childish. He had read more widely and more deeply than any of them; but an intimate of sporadic knowledge of eighteenth-century physiology and herbalism—to say nothing of the *History of the Pyrates*—did not help him in his approach to the mysteries of Euclid and Algebra which, in his studies at Lesswardine, he had not been tempted to unravel. Oddly enough, two of the most formidable obstacles in this educational steeplechase, elementary Latin and French, turned out to be much more easily surmountable than he had imagined them. The scientific textbooks he had already read were peppered with Latin phrases whose meaning he had been compelled to divine, and the formal eighteenth-century English on which he had been nurtured was so full of words with Latin roots that when once he had grasped the trick of inflexions and inverted constructions, the dead language came miraculously to life.

It took him a year of fierce concentration to pass the preliminary test in General Knowledge, without

which he could not be allowed to "register" or enter the Dissecting Room and the Laboratories. During this time he lived the life of a hermit in the home of a Shropshire family settled in North Bromwich whose address Mr. Laxton's enquiries had procured. It was not by any means a suitable lodging. If the authorities of the Prince's College had known where or how he lived they would have been aghast. It was, in fact, a low beer-house built in the seventeenth century and cramped in an alley on the edge of a warren of incredible slums which had so far astonishingly escaped demolition in the vast clearance-scheme under which the "best-governed city"—the phrase was already current—had lately salved its conscience and increased its grandeur by driving a brand-new magnificent thoroughfare, to be called Corporation Street, through the heart of the town.

George Munslow, the landlord of the house, was a Corvedale man, a tenant-farmer's son who had forsaken the land and migrated to North Bromwich some fifteen years earlier. He was a huge, lumbering fellow in the middle forties, with bristling red whiskers and eyebrows and a fiery face and forehead perpetually bedewed with sweat. His body was so big that the bar of the "Cock and Magpie" seemed too small for it. All his movements were those of a man accustomed to the open air, and his resonant voice, which still kept the accent and intonation of his native dialect, together with the loud, ringing laugh which punctuated his

speech, echoed painfully in those cramped surroundings. Mrs. Munslow, his wife, was North Bromwich born. The house had come to him "with her" when her father died, and George Munslow had taken the opportunity of snapping up a wife and a business together. He knew the place well, for even in his father-in-law's days, the "Cock and Magpie" had been recognized as a meeting-place for West-Country farmers, who had "got into the way" of forgathering there when they came to North Bromwich to sell their sheep or to attend the great Cattle Show. She was a small, spare, rather forbidding woman, with a voice so quiet that when she spoke, in her flat and querulous Midland accent, its very tones seemed to imply a criticism and a correction of her husband's boisterousness. She was incarnate respectability. In her father's time the house had been kept as a model of strictness and moderation, and so long as she lived there would be no room in it for loose talk or over-indulgence. She habitually wore black, with a white cotton apron newly laundered and starched every day attached by safety-pins to the cloth of her dress beneath the line of her collar-bones, and had a habit of smoothing a bosom which had ceased to exist. Her features, though drawn and deliberately guarded against the expression of any emotion, had a fine regularity, and, in repose, which was with her an uncommon state, a certain wan sweetness. She had fine eyes, of a grey or hazel so dark as to appear almost black, and a directness of glance

that was not easily evaded. John feared her at sight. He had often been warned by old "Dr." Mortimore against "managing women" ("Lead a poor beggar a dog's life, ha?"), and though he had never met one before he recognized the variety immediately.

The third member of the Munslow family, a girl of about his own age, named Laura, their only child, had inherited her mother's slender physique and something of her faded distinction of feature together with her father's colouring. Her hazel eyes were lighter and gentler than her mother's, and the aggressive red of George Munslow's hair had been darkened in hers to the hue of an autumn beech-leaf. It seemed probable that Mrs. Munslow had married latish in life, and the daughter lacked the abundant vitality which, in such different ways, distinguished both her parents. She was a graceful, languid girl, slow-moving, slow-spoken, with a skin of an almost dazzling greenish whiteness. John thought her beautiful and in some way rare at first sight. When, a little later, he visited the North Bromwich Art Gallery, he perceived with admiration that she belonged to the drooping physical type which the pre-Raphaelites—particularly the chief pride of the city—Burne-Jones—had adopted as their standard of female beauty. Later still, when he came to "walk" the Prince's Hospital, he recognized Laura Munslow as a typical case of the chlorotic anæmia which was the most common complaint (a result of the prevalent fashion of tight-lacing, to which her

mother subscribed, and lack of fresh air and light) among the city's young women. This was small wonder, seeing that the sunless alley in which the "Cock and Magpie" stood and her mother's dislike of letting her out of her sight gave her as much chance of improving her colour as a potato stored in a cellar—while Laura, in any case, found her own pallor becoming and would have been sorry to lose it.

It was George Munslow who welcomed John heartily the moment he appeared in the bar that first evening with his box on his shoulder. He did not even trouble to open the letter Mr. Laxton had written to him.

"I know who you be, my lad," he roared, "I know who he is, mother. You're Matt Bradley's lad, what Jim Laxton wrote me about, and the spit out of Matthew's own mouth, or I'll eat my hat. Put a beard on your face and I wouldn't know the difference. Sit you down, my lad. Come on, give him a pint of beer, mother!"

Mrs. Munslow laid down her knitting and gave him half a pint in a pewter tankard. The glance her dark eyes gave him was not encouraging; but George Munslow knew her ways better than to be discouraged.

"Drink it up, drink it up, my lad, and get on with another," he bellowed. "There's no harm to it. Brewed it myself, naught but malt and Hereford hops: the real Shropshire way. Yes, I mind me now, I had

a letter from Laxton. I gave it you, mother, didn't I?" he added defensively.

"You gave me no letter, George," Mrs. Munslow replied. She went on knitting faster. The needles clicked viciously.

"Well, well, if so be as I didn't it must have slipped my memory. I reckoned you'd read it."

"I've told you already you gave me no letter. Who is this young man?"

"Well, I've told you who he be, haven't I? He's Matt Bradley's boy. Matt Bradley, an old friend of mine. Bost it all, you must have heard me tell of Matt Bradley? No better judge of a horse between Shrewsbury and Hereford and none better known. Killed by a kick from an entire he was, at a pony-drive. You must have heard tell on *that*, now?"

"Not so much as a word." Mrs. Munslow shrugged her thin shoulders: her stays creaked. "Well, what does the young man want here, anyway? You'd better open that letter and see."

"I *know* all about what he wants, mother." He snatched the tankard from John's hands and went on rumbling as he refilled it behind the counter. "He's been working this long time with old 'Dr.' Mortimore—you're not going to pretend you've never heard of *him*, now!—old 'Dr.' Mortimore of Lesswardine, who adopted him like and left him his house and his money"—the dark eyes brightened piercingly—"and now, well, now he's come to North Bromwich to be

a student, and welcome, my lad, for your poor dad's sake as well as your own, to say naught on Jim Laxton's! What did I tell you about that beer, then?" he added to John in a husky whisper behind his hand.

"What kind of a student?" Mrs. Munslow asked coldly.

"That's a question to ask, mother," George Munslow said regretfully. "Haven't I told you this lad was working with old 'Dr.' Mortimore? One of them medical students, that's what he's going to be."

Mrs. Munslow said "Oh . . .", and a great deal more than "Oh" by implication. In that word, for the first time in his life, John Bradley encountered the deep-rooted distrust of the English lower middle-classes in those days for all medical students, who were supposed—not entirely unreasonably—to be wilder and more licentious than any others.

"What Jim Laxton said in the letter you've read and seemingly forgotten," George Munslow went on, "was that he hoped we'd look after this lad of Matthew's whom he thinks the world on, and maybe give him a bed for a night or two till he gets settled in like. And of course, as *you* know, him being a favourite of Jim's, like, to say nothing of Matt Bradley's lad, I wrote him, why certainly. And I will say it's a treat to hear a Shropshire tongue again."

John evaded another hospitable attempt on his tankard. Mr. Munslow, his red face sweating freely, mumbled something about being dry as a bone and

disappeared once more behind the counter, refilled his own pint and half emptied it, then returned to his seat by the fire and sat twiddling his thumbs.

"Well, here you are, anyway," he said, "so all's well that ends well, as the Bible says. Where does that come from, Laura?"

"I don't know, dad, I'm sure," the girl said languidly. Ever since he entered the room her eyes had been examining John Bradley. He was interested in her himself, but disliked this critical scrutiny. It made him unpleasantly aware of his rusticity. Even if he was rough and awkward, nobody had the right to stare at him as though he were some odd sort of animal.

"There, now!" said George Munslow. "D'you hear that, my lad? She doesn't know. There's education for you! How's your mother getting on, then? I never had the pleasure of meeting her, but I've often heard tell on her."

John Bradley blushed. Strangely enough, though he rarely thought of it, that subject still had the power to make him uncomfortable. As he hesitated to answer, he saw that Mrs. Munslow had looked up from her knitting and that those dark eyes were fixed on him.

"She's left Lesswardine," he said. "I don't know where she's gone. She went away two years ago. I think she's married."

"Were you the only child?" Mrs. Munslow asked slowly.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And you don't even know where she is?"

"I'm afraid I don't, ma'am."

"Have you any other relations . . . uncles or grand-parents?"

"Not that I know of, ma'am."

Mrs. Munslow said: "H'm" and went on with her knitting. There was a long silence during which, as it seemed to him, the plethoric face of George Munslow, sitting over the fire, grew red to the point of bursting. Then Mrs. Munslow spoke quietly:

"Get some clean sheets out of the cupboard, Laura," she said, "and put them to air, and make up the bed in the back bedroom."

"Yes, mother." The girl rose languidly and moved away. She was taller than John had thought. George Munslow smiled and nodded his head reflectively, then began to hum a tune to himself as if to make it clear that though he had gained his point he was not even remotely interested in his wife's decision. John saw him slowly crumple Mr. Laxton's letter in his fist—it was a very small hand, he noticed, quite out of proportion with the rest of him—and toss it, unopened, on the fire.

"The young man can stay here to-night and find lodgings to-morrow," Mrs. Munslow said.

(III)

This impression of his first night at the "Cock and Magpie" was the one Dr. Bradley remembered most vividly. He stayed with the Munsloes for more than two years. The back room upstairs, in which Laura made up his bed, became, during that time, the centre of his work—that is to say, of his life—and soon fitted him as snugly as "Dr." Mortimore's book-littered limbo at Lesswardine, than which it was even smaller. A huge, sagging bed, with a feather mattress, filled the greater part of it, barely leaving room for the trestle-table in front of the window at which he worked by candlelight far into the night, the new books, which he bought second-hand at a stall in Cobden Street, and the sea-chest containing the old ones and Captain Kidd who lay there with folded bones, as in a neolithic barrow, awaiting the day when Euclid and Algebra and Latin should have been done with (and immediately forgotten) and his medical studies proper should begin. There was no striking view from that window to distract John's eye from his studies: nothing, in fact, but a little dark well of a court-yard beneath it in which George Munslow mashed his grist of malt and his Hereford hops and seethed and cooled and racked the dark brew of which he was so proud. Beyond this, the vertical section of a half-demolished house, with strips of paper sloughing from the

uncovered party-walls and rusty fire-grates hanging in mid-air, which marked the limit of the Corporation's unfinished Improvement Scheme. All day and all night the noises of demolition and rebuilding went on with such intolerable persistence that he was driven to take himself and his work to the Reading-room of the new Free Library, opposite the Corinthian Town Hall, where, at least, there was quiet and, in the dark winter days when the smoke of the Black Country drooped over North Bromwich in a sooty pall, the boon of gas-light to outweigh the disadvantage of an atmosphere burdened with the smell of not too clean humanity.

The air of this little back bedroom, close though it might be, was comparatively clean, being permeated, when the window was open, by the malty aroma of Mr. Munslow's brewhouse, and when it was shut, by the faintly spiritous exhalations that came upstairs from the bar below. He felt happy in the Munslow household. George's bluff and sometimes clumsy benevolence usually expressing itself in the offer of a pint of his own home-brewed, which he believed to be a panacea for every human infirmity—"The best physic in the world," as he put it—and his anxiety to make John feel at home, were a friendly (and sometimes an embarrassing) corrective to Mrs. Munslow's forbidding manner: a manner which superficially suggested that she still had doubts of him and considered it her duty to keep him at arm's length—particularly from Laura—and "in his place," but

which concealed an anxiety for his physical welfare as well as for his morals, and was relaxed, at times, to reveal, without any spoken word or with words that contradicted it, an almost maternal intimacy and tenderness. As to his relations with Laura, Mrs. Munslow need not have had any fear of romantic developments. The struggle in which he was engaged was far too grim, his handicap too overwhelming, for him to spare time to think much about her or any other young woman. He was shy of girls, anyway, not having ever had anything to do with them, and though Smiles's *Self Help*, which Mr. Laxton had confidently recommended as a complete Guide to Getting On, was discreetly silent on the dangers of female companionship, Mr. Laxton, who was himself a bachelor, had deeply impressed him with these perils, though indeed, in the arduous lives of Mr. Smiles's examples, there was no room for anything but work. He was staggered, for instance, to learn from the account of Mr. William Jackson of Birkenhead, whom he had never heard of, that this gentleman, in his youth, "*obtaining access to a set of the Encyclopædia Britannica read the volumes through from A to Z, partly by day,*" but chiefly by night! "*Now,*" the author triumphantly proclaimed, "*he has ships sailing on almost every sea, and holds commercial relations with nearly every country on the globe.*" The way of *Self Help*, it seemed, was no primrose path, though, crushed as he was by Mr. Jackson's achievement, he was mildly consoled for his

shortcomings when, some three hundred pages later, his mentor insisted that: *Multifarious reading weakens the mind like smoking, and is an excuse for its lying dormant. It is the idlest of all idlenesses, and leaves more of impotency than any other.*

Yet even if he had not been so earnestly committed to helping himself, it is doubtful if the proximity of Laura Munslow would have disturbed him in those days. In speech she was almost as reticent as her mother, a creature who seemed incapable of any emotion, let alone passion. That she was beautiful in her bloodless way, he was ready to admit even then. If he had not recognized this it would have been forced upon him when he heard the extravagant compliments which the customers of the "Cock and Magpie" paid her and which she received with the same loveless, listless apathy as the orders her mother snapped at her. Only once, in his first year at North Bromwich, did she show the faintest trace of interest in him or his work—on the evening when he came home with the great news that he had passed his preliminary examination and would now be put on the register. Mrs. Munslow had smiled, looking up from her knitting, to share his triumph, and her husband had stood a round "on the house" and filled himself a quart on the strength of it. All the company in the bar had drunk Johnny's health, though few of them, probably, knew what it was all about, and Laura had carried round the free, frothing tankards as her

father filled them. As she handed John Bradley his, she had lowered her eyes and said quickly: "I'm so glad, John . . . so glad!"—and he saw, as she whispered, a flood of swift colour flushing the marble of her beautiful throat. Late that night, his mind still dizzied by the fumes of success, he had recalled that whisper (her voice was deeper than her mother's and not so querulous) and the miracle of her articulate emotion. It was the first time, he reflected with pleasure, she had ever called him "John." It was the first time, too, he had ever suspected that any girl could forgive his uncouthness or feel pleased when he was happy. It was the first time any woman had struck him as being vaguely desirable; and, realizing that this was so, he felt rather proud of himself. He had made no friends as yet in North Bromwich and felt the need of one. It would be pleasant, he thought, to enlarge on his future and to explain how really remarkable his present achievement was to a girl who could blush and whisper so charmingly, in defiance of all the veiled menaces *The Student's Handbook* contained on the subject. But next evening, when he came home determined to develop this new relationship from the exciting point at which it had been cut off, he found Laura as null and unresponsive as usual. The blush and the whisper, it seemed, had been nothing more than her part in the general congratulations, like George Munslow's round of free drinks. When he refused to accept her discouragement and

tried to talk to her, he had a feeling that Mrs. Munslow's dark eyes were fixed on him, her ears strained to catch every word; and though this made him angry, it deterred him—for Mrs. Munslow's disapproval was more important to him than her daughter's attractions. He had been momentarily fluttered by Laura, but he wasn't in love with her—thank heaven for that!

(iv)

The drudgery of "catching up" was over. His real task had begun. He was a registered medical student, his name inscribed on the roll of the Prince's College of Medicine.

Dr. Bradley recalled the afternoon when in company with the other men of his year he had waited in the dank passage outside the office of the Dean of the faculty. He could see that little group now and remember the faces—as a general impression rather than in detail—of every one of them. They must, in fact, have been callow youths, as timid as himself, yet, in the mass, he had found them intimidating. He was aware of the correctness of their clothes, so well-cut in comparison with his own: even more of their urban air of well-mannered assurance. They stood talking and laughing in small groups, for some were already acquainted. Though they appeared to take no notice

of him, his self-consciousness suggested that they had already assessed and rejected him, and were amused by the intrusion of this rude and rustic oaf with his bony limbs, his huge fists, his dark, scowling, low-browed face, his untidy hair. He smiled to think of himself now, standing there apart with his clammy hands clenched, defensively prepared to hate every one of them and to hold his own. At that moment he could not have believed that all were to be his familiars and some his friends; that some few were destined for brilliant careers and others for dismal failure, and the majority, like himself, for that undistinguished life of unbroken toil and ill-rewarded service which is the lot of the general practitioner. It filled him now with awe rather than with pity or regret—when he reflected that out of that group which had clustered round the Dean's doorway nearly all his friends had lived their lives and vanished for ever. Doctors are not, as a rule, long-lived.

They stood there, stamping their feet on the stone-flagged corridor to keep warm. From time to time a uniformed porter bawled out a name, and its owner left the group in which he stood talking and hurriedly straightened his tie and humbly entered the office. It seemed a long time to John before his own name was called. When he heard it, it took him by surprise and he started forward like a bull charging into a pen. The door closed behind him. He found himself in a small gas-lit room. In front of him and separated from

him by an expanse of leather-topped desk sat the Dean and Professor of Anatomy, Charles Borden, a man of fifty with a short brown beard streaked with grey, a large, ugly mouth, and steady blue eyes which appeared to regard this irruption with mildly surprised but well-controlled amusement. He looked down at his list of new entries; then said, in a quiet voice with a faint Midland accent: "Good afternoon, Mr. Bradley."

"Good afternoon, sir," John said. He had never been called "Mr." before, and could not feel quite sure that the Dean was not laughing at him, though there was nothing but kindness in the smile that accompanied the salutation.

"Kindly tell me something about yourself, Mr. Bradley. You are not a North Bromwich man."

"No, sir. I come from Shropshire."

"And a very good place to come from. How old are you? Nineteen? Ah, I thought you looked rather older than our students usually are. You evidently decided to take up medicine rather later than the others. There's no harm in that. In fact, it's all to the good. Just tell me, shortly, why you want to be a doctor. That's the thing I always like to know first."

Professor Borden leaned back in his chair and listened, his head tilted backward, his blunt fingertips pressed together, his eyes, through lids half closed, acutely, dispassionately watching the eager face before him, his brow wrinkled, from time to time, as he tried to piece together John's incoherent recital, his quiet

voice halting its flow occasionally to put in a shrewd question. When the story was finished he nodded his head in approval.

"An interesting history, Mr. Bradley," he said. "I think we may agree that you have a vocation, and that, heaven knows, isn't common in any profession. You've done very well so far. You must have worked hard to pass the Preliminary in a year with such a heavy handicap. If you go on working as well as that, you should have no difficulty in qualifying; but I'm afraid you'll have to forget almost as much as you learn—I mean what your old friend the bone-setter taught you."

"He was a wonderful clever man, sir. There's no two ways about that," John said innocently. "You should have seen his hands!"

"Yes, I don't doubt he was a clever man. Some of these fellows are extraordinarily successful in certain cases. The trouble is that people only talk about their successes. It's people like myself who have to deal with their failures when they come into hospital. A pretty hard job it is sometimes, and if we don't put them right it's we surgeons who get the blame. That's the way of the world, as you'll know when you're as old as I am. When you put up your plate as a qualified medical practitioner you're a sort of Aunt Sally. Any layman, no matter how ignorant he is, considers he's got the right to have a shy at you. And, mind you this, if you fail, through no fault of your own, they'll

be after your blood. The mob likes nothing better than having a go at doctors. In this country it's one of the most popular sports with no close season, and the huntsman who gives the view-holloas can always count on a big field. That's one of the reasons—to come back to your friend the bone-setter—why loyalty within the profession and a strict ethical code of behaviour (if you know what that means) are essential things that a student should grasp from the first. We may be divided within ourselves on matters of practice, as we happen to be in this city to-day—I suppose you've heard of Professor Lister . . . ?”

John had never heard of Lister.

“Well, that doesn't matter. What is more important than any of these divisions is loyalty to the profession as a whole. And the profession of medicine as a whole, you may take it from me, is a noble calling, and doctors, taking them as a whole, are exceptionally honest men. If you let it be thought that you doubt their general honesty, you'll be dealing a blow not only to the profession itself—which, Lord knows, is used to them—but to the health and happiness and peace of mind of your fellow men. There are cases, of course, in which we can save people's lives without their helping us. But those cases are rare. The strongest of all medicines is faith. And your job is to justify that faith in yourself and your colleagues.” Mr. Borden smiled, and the ugly mouth became charming. “I'm afraid this sounds rather like a sermon,

Mr. Bradley," he said; "but when I see a young man like yourself beginning his medical life, I like him to feel that it's a serious moment. It isn't like any other career. It's full of tremendous responsibilities not only to your patients but to yourself. It's the most poorly paid of any of the learned professions. If it's money you're looking for, the odds are fifty to one on your being disappointed. You may not even be paid in thanks. Never mind about that. You'll have your reward—and you'll have it in this world too—if that adds to the consolation. Very well, Mr. Bradley, that's all. I wish you good luck."

He smiled and held out his hand, and John, rather bewildered, took it. As he turned to go, the Dean called him back. He was laughing.

"One moment, Mr. Bradley," he said. "I made a mistake when I said that was all. I talked so much that I forgot your Composition Fee. You pay half of it now and half in two years' time. Thirty pounds to begin with."

"I'm sorry. I brought it with me, sir."

He pulled out his purse and emptied it of the thirty gold sovereigns which George Munslow had given him that morning in exchange for an order on the bank in Hereford. He counted out the glittering coins on the desk. It seemed, as he looked at it, an enormous amount of money. The Dean must have been aware of what was passing through his mind.

"Do you know," he said, "when I came to this room

thirty years ago and did what you're doing now, the money I paid was borrowed? And I paid it back, Mr. Bradley, by attending midwifery cases at half a guinea a time—out of which I got only ten shillings: the odd sixpence went to the nurse. Yes, that's quite correct. You won't have to fork out any more—except what you pay Diggle, the anatomy-porter, for 'parts' for dissection. I shall see you in the dissecting-room to-morrow. So I'll wish you good luck again, Mr. Bradley. Good-day to you."

(v)

The Dissecting-room. That was the one scene in a student's life which popular fancy, as expressed by George Munslow, had singled out from the rest as a domain of terror. It was less than twenty years since Robert Knox the anatomist, the sinister figure behind the Edinburgh murders of Burke and Hare, had died, and fear of the Resurrectionists accounted, no doubt, for the massive *chevaux de frise* of cast-iron spears which John Bradley had noticed enclosing the graveyard that bordered Sackville Row. Macabre tales were still told by old men in the bar of the "Cock and Magpie" of bodies spirited away by sham mourners which found their way to dissecting-room tables and were heard of no more, and though body-snatching was no longer practised its legend persisted.

Dr. Bradley remembered entering the dissecting-room the first time with some trepidation, bracing himself against a feeling of slight insecurity in the pit of the stomach; but the long-anticipated horror fell far short of imagination. It was placed at the very top of new red brick Gothic building of Astill's College (to which, since the recent fusion of this foundation with "Prince's" the School of Anatomy had been transferred), a low-ceilinged chamber, shaped like an elongated "L", roofed with glass and floored with concrete: in summer almost uninhabitably hot; in winter icily (and blessedly) cold. His first impression was one of clean and airy emptiness, the whole vast floor-space being occupied by no more than a dozen zinc-topped stands or couches supported by iron trestles on which, posed in attitudes of patience or agony, an equal number of subjects, in process of dissection, were laid. Even these, when the first shock of pitiful realization that they were the bodies of men and women who had lived and eaten and talked and loved was past, had little of terror in them. They were so very dead, he told himself, as to have nothing human left in them. These dried-up, writhen, changeling creatures with their skins tanned mahogany brown, so transformed that, at a first glance, neither age nor sex was apparent, showed little more humanity than his old friend Captain Kidd, to whose bony state a number of them were already being reduced. They certainly awakened less horror and discomfort in his mind than

had his first contact with Miss Kilmansegg. What did affect him more forcibly and more unpleasantly than the sight of them was the smell of the place: an odour which did not arise, as at first he supposed, from the corruption of human flesh, but rather from the results of an opposite process—the embalming by which the bodies were preserved. Whatever it might have been, the association of ideas made that odour horrible in its powers of persistence. It clung to his nostrils however much fresh air he might breathe; it clung to his hands however fiercely he scrubbed them—to his hair, to his clothes, to his books. When he left the dissecting-room to scramble his luncheon at a pub, when he came back to his lodgings at night, he was still so aware of it that he found it hard to believe that other folk did not smell him too, and expected to see them edge away from him in horror and shrink from that breath of the charnel-house.

The thing that astonished him most was how soon one got used to it. There were students whom, in the ordinary way, he would have regarded as normally sensitive persons, who found it possible to eat their luncheon sandwiches within range of it; and even more astonishing was the case of the anatomy-porter, Diggle, and his assistant, who spent all their working days in the reek of the subterranean vats in which “subjects” were pickled, or in a minute, unventilated box from which not even the fumes of shag tobacco

could banish that aroma. It seemed, indeed, as if Diggle and his man had come to accept it as a normal constituent of the atmosphere; and their attitude was significant of the fact, which John slowly realized, that a large part of a doctor's life must be spent in an aura of animal odours which the least queasy of laymen would find nauseating, and that a doctor's senses receive these revolting impressions objectively—not only as necessary conditions of his work but also as interesting and valuable clinical signs to be registered and interpreted.

Diggle himself was a "character": a grizzled man with a thicket of bushy whiskers and beard from the midst of which a pair of merry blue eyes continually twinkled. He was small and slightly bow-legged, and his back and shoulders were permanently bent by the weight of the "subjects" he handled. He had been the familiar of many generations of students, had an impeccable memory for their faces, and followed their careers with an interest almost paternal and even more technical and proprietary than that which he lavished on the anonymous dead he dealt with and whose pitiful histories he inscribed in his register.

"Number Seventeen?" he would say to his favourites in confidence. "No, he's not a very good subject, sir, not for 'uppers' or 'lowers.' He's been knocked about a good bit, that poor old chap, at some time or other, though he's a beautiful head and thorax, mind: no two ways about that. But if you'll take my advice,

sir, you'll keep quiet till the beginning of next week when I shall have a lovely young subject, Number Nineteen, coming up. 'Now there's a treat for sore eyes,' I said to myself, when first I saw her. 'There's a bit of luck for my gentlemen!' Come out of the Winsworth Workhouse, she did, though you'd never have credited it by the way she was nourished. So I'll put your name down for her now, sir,—a 'lower,' was it?—to make sure and avoid any 'aggling over 'er."

It was not often that Diggle was so forthcoming as to the origin of his "subjects." It had always been said—and sometimes, perhaps, believed—that the jolly porter had not been above a bit of resurrecting in his time, though the Edinburgh scandal and the Anatomy Act of 1832 had straitened the law and legitimized the supply of unclaimed corpses from hospitals and Poor Law Institutions. Students chaffed him about it still and called him a damned old body-snatcher, and Diggle, flattered, sometimes smiled knowingly and winked a blue eye. It was just as well to be on good terms with him, for the allotment of "parts" went by favour, and he kept the best for his friends. It was lucky for John Bradley that Diggle took a fancy to him, influenced, possibly, by the macabre reflection of what a good "subject" his big-boned body would make, or, perhaps, by the fact that John obviously derived from much the same social class as himself, and he therefore wished him luck. Old

Diggle was no snob, and no poor judge of human nature.

It was no doubt by some instinctive divination of this kind and the desire to be helpful that he contrived to couple John Bradley in the dissection of his first "part" with another first-year student who appeared, on the face of it, as different in every way from himself as could be imagined. John had noticed Martin Lacey particularly on that afternoon when his grudging, defensive eyes had watched the groups of students stamping their feet to keep warm outside the Dean's office. He had picked him out from the rest because, like himself, he stood alone, though Lacey's isolation, indeed, appeared to be of a quality opposite to his, being the discreet aloofness of one who counted himself superior to the crowd rather than the timid self-conscious loneliness of one who would gladly have mingled with it but did not dare. On the whole John Bradley had decided he disliked this young man more than any of the others: he was so elegantly dressed, so completely composed and self-sufficient; his face was so classically handsome, his fair hair so well-groomed, his manner so indolent as to appear vaguely patronizing. When the porter had called "Mr. Lacey" and this young man entered the office, some of the others had sniggered, and John had approved of this sign of instinctive antipathy: it expressed what he felt.

He was not over-pleased when Diggle, into whose hands he had committed himself on the following

afternoon, led him straight to the table at which Lacey was already standing and offered him as a partner.

"This is Mr. Bradley, sir," he announced. "If you haven't found any partner for that there 'lower,' sir, I reckon he might join you."

John was conscious of a swift blue glance that swept over him, like the pencil of a lighthouse-beam, from his tousled hair and red face to his boots whose hob-nails had rung so loudly and so distressingly on the concrete floor as he advanced. That glance was appallingly frank in its critical appraisal. He felt, even before it had reached his feet, that he had been weighed and found wanting and rejected. Diggle must have felt somewhat the same, for he quickly followed up his request with excuses: "You see, sir, there 'appens to be a bigger entry than usual, and, the Dean never having told me, to tell you the truth, sir, I'm a bit short of subjects. Of course, if you two gentlemen don't mind waiting a day or two . . ."

"Mind? Why should I mind?" Lacey's speech was crisp and rapid; his voice light and melodious; it had no trace of a Midland accent. He spoke to the porter, by whom John had felt slightly intimidated, without any hint of conscious superiority but with an unself-conscious assurance that John Bradley envied and found frightening. "Of course I shall be delighted," he said, "if Mr. Bradley will join me." He smiled; his mouth was perhaps a trifle over-refined, John thought, but the thin lips were strong, the teeth white

getting he had told it before; and though the details varied, Johnny never tired of hearing it.) "It was eighteen-twenty, when we captured the forty-gun Spaniard *Esmeralda* in Callao harbour and I first took up with Miss Kilmansegg. They put me aboard the frigate along with the prize-crew and we careened on one of the islands down Pennyas way to get the barnacles off her. It took us two months, that job. A rum place was that island: naught but lobsters and shell-fish—I never saw the like of them. When I left it I swore I'd never eat a lobster again. Nor have I . . . ha?"

Johnny knew by now there was no need to answer these challenging interrogatives, and was silent.

"Well, now, what was I saying? Ay . . . bones. There was hundreds of 'em. I reckon some man-of-war must have run aground and broken up there, and the poor beggars on board her died of starvation or lobsters. Howsomever, there they lay. The crabs had stripped off their flesh as clean as a whistle, and the sun had dried up the sinews left on the j'int's. There they lay on the sand above the high-water line, and I, having naught to do and not being able to walk with a leg and a half, got acquainted with them like you with Captain Kidd there. I handled them bones for six weeks, my lad, and I got to know them so well that if you'd blindfolded me I could have told which skeleton they belonged to, by thunder I could . . . ha? And that's how I know, to this day, better 'n any

doctor, what's up with a j'int, or if there's naught amiss with it. . . .

"What was I saying? Ay, I was talking of the *Esmeralda*. A forty-gun frigate, she was; but a year or two after that Lord Cochrane got sick of them Chileans and took up with Brazil. The Portuguese they were fighting, not the Spaniards. And poor-hearted beggars they were. When I was in San Salvador . . ."

So the cracked old voice droned on. His stories were more exciting than Hakluyt's, if not quite so bloody as those of Johnson's "Pirates"; but though "Dr." Mortimore was liable to slide into them at any moment, he was as anxious to impart his bone-setting lore to Johnny as was he to learn it. He demonstrated his methods on' Captain Kidd, who suffered his manipulations with a perpetual grin that was no longer sinister. He let Johnny stand by during consultations; allowed him to bandage limbs, to hold the basin when he incised an abscess or tapped a hydrocele, and afterwards gave him the trochar or scalpel to wipe—they were never boiled and probably never had been—before putting them back in their purple-plush-lined cases. Johnny watched him draw teeth—a side of the business in which he had earned a wide reputation—admiring the bravura with which he danced round the patient and whipped out a fanged molar and held it up with a flourish. When the "doctor" was away in his trap Jimmy tried that game for himself—on children for preference—and succeeded by practice (and as the

result of minute observation of Captain Kidd's mandibles) in getting teeth out without breaking the patients' jaws. By the end of two years he had almost lost his own name and was known over the countryside as "Dr." Mortimore's young man. If he knew little else, he had learnt the normal anatomy of bones and "joints" and the commercial value of mystery.

(vi)

During all this time John Bradley lived—or, at any rate, slept—in the cottage down by the river. He saw little enough of his mother. By the time "Dr." Mortimore had finished his rambling discourses and consented to relinquish his leg for the night, it was usually so late that Mrs. Bradley had gone to bed. By daylight the old man, who never slept more than five hours, was chafing to be up and about, so that Johnny had usually gone back to get him his cup of tea before his mother had arisen. Since the unbecoming scene precipitated by Mr. Delahay's visit they had had no more quarrels. Mrs. Bradley still regarded herself as the injured party, and Johnny, although the echoes of gossip stung him, held his peace for fear of losing his temper again. He was growing up quickly, in body as well as in mind. He stood well over six feet now and was forced to stoop, as his father had stooped, when he entered the kitchen door. He had long since grown

out of his schoolboy clothes, and would have presented a ridiculous spectacle had not the "doctor," realizing his worth, provided him with new ones to supplement his wages. His shoulders had broadened, too; his chest had filled out, and his speech, now that his voice was broken, resembled his father's in its gruff and rasping timbre—in everything indeed, but its accent, which was that of an educated man, with no more than a trace of the West-country burr that his mother had deplored in his schooldays. But for the lack of beard and moustache his likeness to his father was so striking that strangers he met in the border markets commented on it, and Johnny was proud of this—for Matt Bradley's defects of character were now generally forgotten, while his exploits of strength and daring were already becoming legendary. Was his mother equally aware of this resemblance? Was that why he had seen her catch her breath when, more than once, he had entered the house unexpectedly? That was her concern, not his, he told himself: it was the guilty, not the innocent, who were plagued by ghosts.

In later years when he came to look back on this time Dr. Bradley often reproached himself for having felt so bitterly towards her and behaved so harshly. If he could have lived his life over again, he told himself, he would surely have realized how little Lavinia Bradley deserved such stern treatment. At the time of his father's death she was still a young woman—she could not have been much more than seventeen when

she married him—a woman, that is, of thirty-one, of a passionate disposition and no negligible attractions. A woman, moreover, who had obviously made a bad bargain, with nothing but the transports of an obstinate romanticism to set against poverty, disappointment, insecurity, a complete divorce from the gracious and civilized conditions of the society in which she had been born and her loss of the respect to which she was used. Was it surprising, he asked himself, that a woman in her case should have clutched with an almost frantic eagerness at the least floating fragment of her wrecked self-respect? Even if she didn't love Walter Delahay (and he couldn't believe she had loved him—though even here time tempered his fierce hatred of the silver-mounted gig and the varnished boots)—wasn't it natural enough that she should have been flattered and relieved to find herself capable still of inspiring desire or kindness or admiration, to see even the faintest hope of scrambling out of the depths of degradation and misery into which she had been plunged?

Dr. Bradley even found it possible to analyse his own motives, though no doubt these new-fangled Freudians about whose freaks he had read could have done so without any difficulty. Was the core of his bitterness jealousy of a mother whom he had loved more than he knew, or jealousy for a father whom he had actually feared rather than loved? "Hyperion to a Satyr" hardly fitted the case. Lavinia Bradley was no

Gertrude, nor was poor, ardent Mr. Delahay, for all he knew, a Claudius. As for himself as Hamlet—the very idea was preposterous. All nonsense; that's what it was!

He had given that problem up as insoluble long ago; but even now, at a distance of more than half a century, he wondered at himself when he remembered—and how well he remembered it!—the evening on which this tragic affair had reached its culmination.

He had come down late from the "doctor's" house to the cottage. One ghostly light shone in the kitchen, but his mother was not downstairs. From the moment when he stooped his head to enter the room he was aware of a palpable atmosphere of intense, almost hostile emotion which seemed to fill it even though it was empty. It was unusual for his mother to leave a candle burning when she had gone to bed. As he stood there, perplexed, apprehensive, intimidated by the room's odd feeling, he was aware of soft, hurried movements in her bedroom on the floor above. He went upstairs and tapped at her door. The faint sounds of rapid movement continued. She did not answer him. He scraped back the door and walked in. Her back was towards him. She was bending over a large brass-bound trunk in which, as he knew, she kept her small personal belongings, including the elegant hooped dress she wore when she danced in the candle-light. The room was full of a faint perfume of lavender-dust—he could never smell Tincture of

Lavender afterwards without remembering it—that rose into the air from the clothes she was stretching and folding. He could not believe she did not know he was there, but she made no sign of having noticed his coming. He said: “Mother!” in a harsh, strained voice. She turned round with wide-open eyes and put her hands to her breast as though she were frightened.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m packing my things. I’m going away to-morrow.”

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t know for certain.” Her voice was calmer now.

“Don’t know where you’re going? How long are you going for?”

“For ever. I’m not coming back again. I’m taking nothing with me but what is my own.”

“As if I cared what you took! Are you going with that fancy man of yours?”

She rose to her feet, her eyes shining.

“How dare you speak of him like that?”

He laughed. “That’s what everyone else in Lesswardine calls him anyway. And they call you his lie-by, if you want to know the truth.” His voice rose; his limbs were trembling.

“This damned, nasty-minded, mean little village! Why should I care what they say. But you . . . you . . .”

She advanced towards him; her small fists were

clenched and white, her face flaming red. He drew back; her fierceness frightened him, but his hatred of the man with the varnished boots surged up, overcoming his fear. He held his ground while she glared at him like a wild cat cornered.

"Are you going away with that man?" he repeated. She did not answer. "Are you going away with him?" he shouted.

She nodded her head. "Yes, I'm going away with the only friend I have, the most kind, most loyal friend that ever a woman had."

Then a strange thing happened—John Bradley could not say how or why. He had caught his mother with both hands by her upper arms. His powerful fingers closed on them; the soft flesh yielded. She was so small and frail that if he had let his anger carry him away he could have crushed her, broken her. It was a sharp cry of pain that brought him to his senses and showed him the pair of them—himself towering black above her, his mother limp and helpless. His fingers relaxed their unconscious grip of iron. She swayed and sank to the ground and lay prostrate, mute and quivering. He stared at her, wondering what he had done, then knelt down beside her. He took her hand, clumsily fondling it. It was clammy and icy cold.

"Mother . . . mother . . ." he cried.

"You hurt me," she said. "You hurt me."

Her voice no longer sounded fierce. It was thin and querulous: the voice of a child even more bewildered

than hurt. As for himself, the blinding flare of anger had died down as swiftly as it had arisen. He felt chilled and empty—as cold as the hand he pressed but which did not respond. And out of his empty coldness there rose a new warmth of pity, remorse, and tenderness and humility. He was no longer the stern avenger of wrong but the little boy with whom she, herself a child, had played on the floor by the kitchen fireside on those almost forgotten days when he and she had been one and nothing could part them. She was his mother, his darling mother, and he had hurt her. He kissed the cold hand he held and bowed his head to her bosom. He himself was crying now. He couldn't help it, though he knew it was ridiculous for a great boy of his age to cry. His sobs roused her from her silent abstraction.

"Johnny, Johnny," she pleaded—there was a tender broken laugh in her voice. "You mustn't do that, my child. I know you didn't mean it . . . of course you didn't."

He shook his bowed head disconsolately. It was no good her trying to explain away that unforgivable violence. He felt he could never atone for it—never as long as he lived. And now she had gathered him in her bruised arms; she was hugging him close to her breast; she was stroking his head and fondling it with gentle fingers that strayed through his hair.

"I'm all right really," she said. "You frightened me more than you hurt me."

"I would sooner have died than use you like that," he muttered.

"I know, Johnny. I know." She bent and kissed him softly, her lips lingering dreamily on his cheek. He loved her, he thought—of course he had always loved her. That was what made the whole thing so unbearable.

"Does that make it feel better?" she whispered. "Well, now it's your turn. Kiss and be friends, as we used to say." She spoke as though humouring a small child. He smiled wanly and kissed her again. "Yes, that's better," she said. "It's all over now."

He wished he could think so. For a long time they remained there in silence. Her consoling arms were still about him and, from time to time, some mysterious swell of emotion impelled her to clasp him tighter. At last she spoke, very gently:

"Johnny," she said, "I have been wanting to talk to you about all this for such a long time. But somehow I couldn't. Partly because you wouldn't let me. You've grown so big and forbidding—just like your father. On the other hand, in some ways, you're still such a baby. I knew there were things I could never make you understand however hard I tried to make them clear to you, so what was the good of trying? But now we seem nearer to one another again, don't we, my darling? So will you be patient with me, just for a little while?"

He pressed her hand, not trusting his voice to speak.

"You see," she went on, "I was not seventeen when I married your father—no older than you are now, though it's hard to believe. I was just a wild girl, with a tremendous will of my own, and I fell in love without knowing what I was doing. Remember, Johnny, I don't blame your father for anything. He was not very kind to me at times—I expect you know that—but it wasn't entirely his fault. He belonged—oh, how shall I say it?—he belonged to a different world; he couldn't be expected to understand what I really was—I mean the things that had made me. I think at the time you were born I must have been just about the loneliest woman in the world. That was my fault—not his. Oh, really nobody's fault: just a thing that couldn't be helped. When you came along I was happier—but even then, Johnny, I couldn't control my thoughts. It wasn't disloyal: I merely couldn't help thinking of what my life was and what it might have been. When anyone is as lonely as I was there's so much time for thinking and thinking.

"Then your father died . . ." She paused. "He was not a bad man, Johnny. A strange man—though we lived together for fifteen years I never knew him. Something sombre and dark . . . I don't know . . . human beings are so mysterious. We had been poor enough, heaven knows, when he was alive: when he died it was desperate. If you hadn't gone to the doctor's, I don't know what I should have done, even though it meant that I hardly ever saw you. And

then . . .” She hesitated . . . “Then Walter Delahay turned up. I had known him when I was a girl and he a young man. He’s not young any longer, of course, and I’m thirty-five.

“We met quite by chance, in the lane. I was terrified when he stopped and stared at me. I wished I could run away, but he wouldn’t let me. He recognized me at once in spite of my being so changed. He gave me a lift and we drove back here. That was the day you came in and found us and behaved so naughtily—yes, you were naughty, Johnny, there’s no denying it. We sat there and talked. He wanted to know all about me. It was—how shall I say it?—like the breaking of a dam: all the things that had been pent up inside me, the thoughts that couldn’t be spoken pouring out in a flood. It was like breaking through into a new world—or the old one, perhaps—no, no, a new heaven. I felt happier, nearer to myself that night than I’d felt for years. I was angry with you for spoiling it. I couldn’t help that.

“He came to see me again the week after that. He’s come again every week—sometimes more than once—that’s why the village has been talking. I had no idea he had come into Trewern and lived so near Lesswardine. I told him that it was unwise, but he wouldn’t listen to me. He said he had always been in love with me, even when I was a girl. And I couldn’t send him away. I didn’t want to. His coming to see me made such a difference. He insisted on giving me money,

too. I'm not ashamed of that. I wouldn't let him give me anything that mattered to him. He used to laugh^a at me.

"He asked me to marry him, Johnny, the third time he came. That's more than three years ago. I told him I couldn't think of it. I was shy of myself for one thing. There was another: I thought he was being carried away by a chivalrous idea—he's like that—and that it probably seemed to him a romantic idea to pick up an old love from the gutter, so to speak. And there was something even more important than that. There was you, Johnny . . ."

"Me?" It was the first time he had spoken since she began.

"Yes, you were only fourteen. If I'd married him then I couldn't have taken you with me. It wouldn't have been fair. I could see he didn't exactly take to you—and you didn't give him much encouragement either, did you, Johnny? So I said, no, I wouldn't, and I think I was right. He's very timid, having been a bachelor so long, and when once I'd said 'no' he never asked me again until last week. This time I said 'yes': I'd made up my mind to do that if ever he asked me—for his sake as much as for my own. We're neither of us young any more. He's over fifty although he doesn't look it. And you are no longer a child. You've made a life of your own now. I hardly ever see you. You don't *need* me, do you, Johnny? Now tell me the truth."

He was silent; but the truth was so clear as to need no answer: he had only become aware of the need of her when he saw she was going away.

"You must do what you want to, Mother," he said. "I can manage for myself, as you say, if it comes to that."

"And I know I am right—I know it," she said. "This has gone on too long. If I didn't make the break now I should never do it. Walter wants us to go abroad, to make a new start. It may be a long time before I see you again, Johnny. If I begin to think about things of that kind I shall start wavering, and that won't do: I have given my promise. Are you still angry with me? Try not to be angry, Johnny, and love me a little. I need loving, you know: life has not been so very kind to me."

He kissed her again. There was no question of anger now. He saw that even if she had wanted to take him he could not have gone with her. At that moment there was more of pity in his heart than love.

The kiss reassured her. "Now go to bed, darling," she said, "and leave me to finish my packing. If I'm not up in the morning when you go, you'll come and see me, won't you? Don't worry about the house: the rent's paid up to Christmas. You can sell what's in it if you want to. There's nothing of any value, I'm afraid, but it's all your father left us."

He slept little that night. When he came downstairs next morning she was there before him. She

wore a black dress which made her look frail and small, black kid gloves, and a hat with a veil on. She had brewed a pot of tea for herself and gave him a cup. He drank it in silence: there was nothing more to be said. When he had drunk his tea, he kissed her through the strands of the veil. It was an odd sensation, one that he never forgot. Then he turned quickly and went out. That flushed face beneath the veil was the last he ever saw of her. It was difficult now, in old age, to remember more than a vague impression of that fragile figure in black. None other had ever replaced it. She had remained for him always shadowy, gentle, pitiful, incredibly young. That was how he thought of her now, though, if she were still alive, she must have been over ninety.

(vii)

"Dr." Mortimore was only too glad when John Bradley changed his quarters and came to live with him permanently. A man of his age never knew at what time of the night he might not require help, and, as he said, he was growing no younger. The contents of the cottage by the river were sold, notice was given, and the house abandoned. Matt Bradley's poor sticks of furniture were not worth a sale: villagers came and saw what they wanted and paid Johnny on the spot for it and took it away with them. There was plenty of talk in Lesswardine about his mother's

sudden departure; it buzzed up like flies from a midden, but little of it reached him—partly, no doubt, out of the innate delicacy which country-folk show towards a subject tender or embarrassing; partly, also, because John had not inherited his father's forbidding blackness of brow for nothing. Nobody knew where his mother had gone, and nobody asked him except old "Dr." Mortimore, to whom he unfolded the story without reserve.

The old man's judgment was definite: "Your mother's done right, lad," he said. "There's no two ways about it. The only mistake she made was not to have jumped at the chance when he asked her first. If she'd come to me straight and told me: 'Look'ee here, Dr. Mortimore, I've had an offer that'll lift me out of my misery, but I can't in reason expect to take Johnny with me,' I should have said: 'You go to it, my wench, while you can. You're a young woman yet, ay, and not so bad looking, but you won't be either much longer, ha? You'll lose the boy soon enough, you make no mistake, as soon as he starts looking around and sets his eye on a girl that takes his fancy. And then where'll you be? You leave Johnny to me. I'll look after him.' That's what I should have told her, ha? But women's like that. The first time she made up her mind she did it in a hurry, and the poor wench had learnt her lesson, the same as we all do."

He had not started "looking around" as yet, and no girl had "taken his fancy." There were various reasons

for this. First of all, the painful scene of his mother's lover's first visit and his dark cogitations afterwards had hurt his soul more deeply than he knew, and determined him in a bitter subconscious distrust of all living women as creatures of a despicable lightness and frailty. The secret shame of that scene went with him and isolated him. Even more powerful than this elemental distrust was the consciousness, half proud, half humiliating, of the essential difference of his mind—a lonely mind already voyaging through strange seas of thought to landfalls of peculiar knowledge—from those of the village boys and girls with whom he had grown up, and, added to this, a deep-seated conviction not merely as to the inner difference of his mind but as to his outward oddness—that big body too tall for its years grown out of his schoolboy clothes and even protruding from the second-hand suit “Dr.” Mortimore had bought him. It was a good thing, he thought, that he hated the village girls, since it was quite certain that if he had “fancied” one she would only have laughed at him; and it was fortunate too that his mind had found interests which neither they nor their admirers could share, since this gave him a serene escape from the turmoils of calf-love in which many of his contemporaries were evidently already involved.

“Dr.” Mortimore had declared that he should sleep in the book-cluttered back bedroom. There was barely room to wedge a bed into it; but the “doctor,” who

had spent most of his early life in the fo'c'sles of sailing ships, considered it a miracle of space and airiness, and indeed, if there had been any other available—which apart from the equally crowded attic there wasn't—John Bradley would have preferred it. It gave him the chance of pursuing his studies in the history of the world and the nature of its contents at any time of the day or night without the risk of disturbing his patron's light slumbers. He lay between bastions of books and read by candlelight until his eyes refused to stay open any longer; he read again from the moment when daylight returned (those sweet dawns of Lesswardine!) until the bout of coughing which was the first sign of the "doctor's" return to consciousness warned him that it was time to go downstairs and make tea and, when this had loosened the old man's phlegm, to strap Miss Kilmansegg on to the withered thigh and sweep out the stable and groom the aged pony.

During the next two years the "doctor" continued to instruct him in the curious empirical lore he had discovered for himself—for the most part by the method of trial and error. His old back was growing stiffer, and so were his limbs. He shrank from the ordeal of tottering downstairs before he had "thawed out," as he said, and "got back the use of them." In the end he decided it was not worth the trouble and torment; so John made up a bed for him in the room downstairs beneath the approving grin of Captain Kidd. His

small, wiry frame was so wasted now that had John not already "learnt his j'int's" from the pirate, "Dr." Mortimòre's skeleton could have provided him with a substitute.

He suffered a great deal: the only part of his body, he declared sardonically, that did not share in his roving rheumatic pains was "Miss Kilmansegg." When the second winter came, he could not bring himself to face its rigours. The pony grew fat in the stable, and "Dr." Mortimore kept to his bed from which—his yellowish scalp and his thin white beard framed by blankets pulled up to the chin—he conducted his consultations by proxy, relying on John's "eyes and hands" to report the conditions on which he based his treatment.

"You'll never have eyes like mine, nor hands either, Johnny," he boasted. "But you've not done so bad: you're a sharp lad, I've always said that for you; and when I'm gone—ha?—I reckon that folk will soon come to you, provided you stay in this house. That's human nature. When people want anything, be it physic or beer, they get into the way of going to the same place after it without thinking. It's habit, not thinking, that folk go by, the same as dogs . . . ha?"

That was the first time the old man had ever spoken of dying. Indeed, in these days, his expenditure of energy was so small—being hardly more than that of his heart's slow pulsations—that there seemed no reason why he should not continue to live on what was

left of it for another ten years. It was the will, perhaps, rather than the power to go on living, that he lacked. The zest had gone out of his life; he was mortally tired rather than ill. And he looked it. When John found him one morning cold and stiff (he had died in his sleep) there was nothing but an unnatural stillness to distinguish between life and death.

(VIII)

"Dr." Mortimore must have been prepared for this sudden cessation of living. Under his pillow John found an envelope containing his will, properly prepared and duly attested on one of his last visits to Hereford. He left all he possessed "to my assistant John Bradley, in the hope that he will not forget the things I have taught him." The sole executor was the solicitor who had drawn up the will. "Dr." Mortimore left him twenty pounds for his services. Surprisingly: John had no idea that he possessed so much in this world.

But he possessed, it appeared, considerably more. Apart from the house and its heterogeneous contents, there was a sum in the bank of nearly a thousand pounds, the accumulated savings of more than half a century of practice and humble living.

John Bradley came back from Hereford with his head in a whirl. The executor had offered politely to

take care of his affairs as soon as probate was granted. He refused the offer cautiously. One of the things the old man had taught him was a deep distrust of all lawyers. He consulted instead his only friend in Lesswardine: Mr. Laxton, the schoolmaster. Mr. Laxton sat stroking his beard and gravely listening to him.

"This is a great fortune, my lad," he said. "If a man that knew more about the handling of money than I do took care of it, it might bring you in the best part of a pound a week. A pound a week for the whole of your life, and the capital untouched. And if you work for your living and don't touch the income, mind you (of course, more's the pity, you never got so far as compound interest), in twenty years odd, when you're thirty-eight or nine, isn't it?—that thousand pounds will have grown to two. At fifty-nine you'll have four thousand pounds in the bank; and if you live over eighty, as you may by the grace of God, you may die worth ten thousand. Only think of that!"

Johnny told him modestly that dying at eighty was the last thing in the world he wanted to think of. He wanted to know how to use his money now to the greatest advantage. Mr. Laxton was shocked by the idea. The thought of a will in five figures was too splendid to be missed.

"There's one thing I will say," he went on, "and I think this is the time and the place to say it firmly. 'Dr.' Mortimore was a kind old man and many people thought highly of him. I won't deny that, and I won't

deny that even before he left you this money you owed a great deal to him. He took you into his house at a very awkward moment. But this I will say, my lad, and I say it in all seriousness: 'Dr.' Mortimore's calling was not a respectable calling, and I should feel sorry indeed if I thought you were going to follow it. You have been allowed an opportunity such as is given to few to qualify yourself for a more respectable position. Money isn't everything. I'm afraid you've got to learn this; but you're sharp enough—I know that—and you have the means in your hands to rise in the world above any of your schoolfellows. I should aim high, Johnny. Yes, I should aim high."

Johnny asked him what exactly he meant by this. Mr. Laxton stroked his beard and perpended.

"The direction depends on your inclination," he said. "I should not like to think your last four years have been wasted. From what I have heard people say I think you have shown an aptitude—yes, an aptitude—for the not very respectable calling the 'doctor' followed. You will probably have to forget most of what he taught you; but it is just possible that some of it may be useful. So I think"—as he reached the culminating point of his advice Mr. Laxton's speech became slower, his tones more impressive—"I think you might easily do worse than follow the same direction on more legitimate lines. I should aim at the most respectable trade in that line, I think, and become a chemist. You will have ample capital to set up in busi-

ness. Chemists are among the most highly respected members in every community. That is my advice to you.”

Johnny had hung on his words. Mr. Laxton's slow manner and the dignity of his beard had always impressed him; yet the culmination of this ponderous exposition fell a trifle flat. As he listened, there arose before his inward eye the vision of a shop before which he had paused for a moment the day before in Hereford: a small, dark cavern of a place through whose open door the familiar smell of medicants had caught his nostrils and stayed him. In each window, on either side of the door, stood an enormous glass-stoppered flagon or urn whose clear contents flashed rays of ruby and emerald, and in the midst of the shop itself, in a mahogany arm-chair, sat a little old man in a black alpaca coat, with a bleached clean-shaven face under a black silk skull-cap. He sat there slowly twiddling his thumbs and waiting for custom, more like a waxwork figure than a man—the intrinsic of a sluggish and passive life. As he thought of the chemist's motionless figure, “respectable” as it was, he was overwhelmed by the contrast between it and that of “Dr.” Mortimore, so intensely alive and shrewd and dynamic, for all his great age. What sort of static existence was this: to sit in a prim, dim, spotless shop, year in and year out, like some pallid sedentary spider in a dark corner, crawling slowly behind the counter from time to time, to dispense a

doctor's prescription, to weigh out a penn'orth of salts of lemon to clean a straw-hat, or to unlock a glass show-case for a small boy who wanted a tooth-brush, compared with the bone-setter's vagrant manner of life, jogging up and down the Radnor March under windy skies, breathing the sweet hill air: a life rich in human experience among men who were men, a life that demanded quick apprehensions in a trade that sold not the material products of factories but the skill of trained hands and the wisdom of cunning eyes? "Hands and eyes: Strength and Touch . . . ha?" He could hear the old man's brusque interrogation, see the shrewd old eyes twinkling challenge above the white bristling beard. He was seized by a sudden revolt against Mr. Laxton's unadventurous proposals and a new inspiration: :

"That's no life for me," he said. "I know I could never put up with it. Why shouldn't I be a doctor—a real doctor, I mean?"

"Well, that," Mr. Laxton said, "*would* be flying high, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER THREE

(1)

"THAT was a long time ago . . . a long time ago," Dr. Bradley thought, as he gingerly reached out a carpet-slipped foot and gave a lump of coal at the side of the fire a gentle push. It was in the autumn of eighteen-eighty, and I was rising eighteen—nearly nineteen, in fact. That makes it fifty-five years ago. I came out of Lesswardine a rich man with just on a thousand pounds to my credit, and to-morrow I shall go back to Lesswardine, if I'm living, a poor man, with about three hundred more. That's just over five pounds a year for my fifty-five years of work—provided I let this young man take over the book-debts at his own valuation, and if I don't, I know I shan't collect a penny. Never could do that sort of thing. Yes, five pounds a year—and they talk about doctors bleeding the public! Let 'em look at the figures of doctors' wills in the newspapers and compare 'em with lawyers'!"

Even to-day he could feel a little bit sore about the Hereford solicitor who had offered to manage his affairs. By the time he had obtained probate and wound up the estate, the handsome sum "Dr."

Mortimore had left in the bank had shrunk considerably. The house had brought in next to nothing. There was no housing shortage in Lesswardine at that time, and what buyer of sense would want to keep an empty dwelling on his hands—more particularly one with a leaky roof and a reputation (thanks mainly to Captain Kidd) of having “summat queer” about it? He had given the pony away: it was too old for serious work. He was glad when a farmer, whose knee he had “put in,” consented to give it a home as a quiet mount for his children. The furniture fetched even less than the house: the stigma of eeriness clung to that too, and there were no old pieces of any distinction to tempt a dealer. As for the bones and the curios—it was natural enough that nobody should want *them* or, for that matter, the bulk of the books, which had neither value nor interest.

During his last days in Lesswardine John made a bonfire of the remains (including Miss Kilmansegg) and buried their ashes and such durable debris as remained unconsumed in a pit in the garden. All he kept for himself were a few of those volumes which had first stirred his imagination, such as the set of Hakluyt's *Voyages* and Johnson's *History of the Pyrates*, a small selection of the more up-to-date medical books (those not more than fifty years old) and—for sentimental as well as professional reasons—the remains of Captain Kidd: to have committed that friendly anatomy to the flames would have smacked of

ingratitude. All these he packed in one of the "doctor's" battered sea-chests: a box of hard tropical wood bound with hammered brass. The rest of his belongings went easily into a small packing-case that still smelt of the witch's kitchen. They were few enough. His old clothes had been thankfully burnt on the pyre of junk, and apart from one brand-new outfit he had bought in Hereford and now wore with a sense of embarrassment, he possessed no others.

He felt no regret in leaving Lesswardine. It was only in later years that the scenes of his boyhood began to fill his mind with a sentimental nostalgia. The past has not been so happy as to make him feel it had any claims on him, and the future was no concern of anyone but himself. All he wanted to do was to slip away quietly, and on this score he need have had no fears, for the village, which had its own life to live, hardly noticed his going until he was gone.

His goal was North Bromwich. So much had been tactfully settled by Mr. Laxton in conference with the local doctor, the only available authority. The choice had rested between The Prince's College, as it was called, out of compliment to the dead Consort, and one of the most anciently established schools in London; but the mere thought of his pupil's being "thrown" (as he put it) on the streets of the Modern Babylon filled Mr. Laxton's mind with concern for his morals. So North Bromwich had it.

The choice was natural enough. During the middle

of the nineteenth century, the wealth of the City of Iron had begun to exert a magnetic influence over all the surrounding countryside and particularly over the lands beyond Severn, where the soil was thinner and people poorer than in the Midland Plain. From the bluffs of the Clees—even from the more distant summits of the Forests of Radnor and Clun—the reflex of the Black Country's fires could be seen reddening the midnight sky like a stormy dawn, the symbol of a richer life and an invitation to share in its profitable activity. North Bromwich and the Black Country had thus become the natural goal of all ambitious and impatient young men in search of fortune and of girls who sought more excitement in service or factory-work than could be found at home. The growing city sucked them out of the countryside like a sponge; and when once the flow of migration had been established there set in another seepage in the opposite direction of folk who were tired of the stresses of urban life, who had made enough money and acquired enough sense to appreciate the treble boon of clean air and space and silence—so that, in the end, by a physical process resembling that of osmosis, the green marches and the black city had become complementary to each other. Hereford and Shrewsbury, the centres of ancient territorial attachments, still commanded respect as markets; but North Bromwich was now the Metropolis of all the West.

Its Medical School, though hardly more than fifty

years old, had already acquired a high reputation. It had always deserved it, Dr. Bradley thought: even now he was glad to feel that he had sold his practice and committed his patients to a North Bromwich man. It was a small school—in the year when he entered it there were less than a hundred and fifty students; but that was all to the good: it meant that this meagre number had the advantage of trying their hands and learning their job on an enormous mass of clinical material, the contents of two hospitals with three hundred beds between them and out-patient departments serving a population of half a million bodies. In the great London hospitals, his friends told him later, a student must elbow his way through a competitive crowd to get at a “case”, and learnt most of his craft second-hand from the surgeon’s lips: in North Bromwich he was able from the first to see disease at close quarters and get to grips with it.

Of those hundred and fifty students few were country lads like himself. The greater part came from the surrounding industrial region. They were nearly all middle-class folk, and a large number—between thirty and forty—sons of medical men, who had already begun to help their fathers in practice and looked to join or succeed them. All but the wealthiest, following the usage of those times, earned their keep and supplemented their meagre resources by acting as unqualified assistants to doctors in the city in whose homes they lived. It was only a few years since the

Society of Apothecaries, to whose licence most of the aspired, had abolished the obligation of five years apprenticeship as a prelude to the granting of its diploma, and though the necessity had gone, the custom persisted. An admirable custom too, Dr. Bradley thought, looking back on it now. Many times, in later years, he had come across men newly qualified and far better equipped in the matter of science (as he was ready to admit) than himself, who found themselves quite at sea in general practice—a calling in which science counts hardly more—perhaps less—than experience in a patient's probable modes of thought, his material surroundings, the limitations imposed on him by popular custom, by mysterious social taboos, by local traditions—even by superstition. For the doctor's first business, as he maintained, was a knowledge of human kind: their lives first, next their idiosyncrasies, and, last of all that scientific lore which was the only equipment these blundering newly-qualified innocents had. "Dr." Mortimore, ignorant of science as he was, had at least taught him that.

(11)

The farmer to whom he had sold the cob gave him and his luggage a lift to Craven Arms where he was going to buy cattle for winter feeding. Mr. Laxton,

who knew the hour at which he was due to depart, left the schoolchildren for a few moments and ran across the road to say good-bye. During the last few days he had exhausted his resources of advice, that were mainly concerned with three "dangers" to none of which Johnny felt himself attracted. As an appendix to his warnings and a reliable Guide to Success, he brought with him as a parting present a volume of admonitions entitled *The Student's Handbook*—and his own copy of Samuel Smiles's *Self Help*: the book on which, as he confessed, he had (without, as it seemed, any startling fulfilment) based his own ambitions. As the trap jogged slowly downhill, with the weight of Captain Kidd and the books behind it, Johnny turned and looked back. He saw the sandstone tower of the church, the school, "Dr." Mortimore's house, the pink-washed cottage opposite with tawny chrysanthemums glowing in the narrow flower-beds, and the weedy, bearded figure of Mr. Laxton standing—rather lonely and pitiful, he thought—in the middle of the road. That was the last he saw of Lesswardine. Oddly enough he could not remember having noticed that morning the bridge, which they certainly crossed, the ford where in days gone by he had watched his father sluicing the mud from the red-wheeled dog-cart, or the cottage in which he had been born.

He remembered no more, in fact—apart from a pint stirrup-cup of brown ale in which a number of strangers appeared to be drinking his health at his

friend the farmer's expense—until he found himself, with the Shropshire hills far behind, in an otherwise empty third-class compartment and becoming sleepily aware of a landscape different from any he had set eyes on before. He was approaching North Bromwich as—from a spectacular point of view—it should be approached, by the line that reaches it from Wolverbury. For the last half-hour the train had been crawling cautiously, like a creature befogged. But there was no fog: the dusky haze which bleared the feeble lamps on the station platforms with yellowish haloes and adhered to the carriage window in a mist of fine particles which, when a shower spattered the panes, dissolved into sooty runnels, was no miracle of Egyptian darkness but the normal atmosphere of the Black Country, the air which he was destined to breathe for the next fifty years. As John Bradley viewed it in that October dusk through the streaks the rain had washed clean on the grimy windows, the great basin in which the coal-measures lay buried appeared to be a domain divided between pitchy blackness and fire. No trees were visible, nor any running water—though occasionally a change in the tune of the rumbling wheels denoted the passage of a bridge or viaduct beneath which stagnant lengths of canal appeared and were gone, and sometimes opaque sheets of water, lying in abandoned quarries or clay-pits, shone surprisingly out of the blackness of the surrounding waste. For the land was all dark. Even the wired

and regular; the blue eyes smiled too—they were deep, almost violet, long-lashed like a woman's, but of a wholly charming openness; they appeared to accept him, as he was, without any reserve.

"Well then, *that's* all right, sir," the porter said with a laugh. He went away chuckling to himself: once more he had shown that he knew his young gentlemen.

"What the devil's the fellow laughing at?" Lacey asked.

"He's probably laughing at me, I should think," John said.

Lacey's mouth hardened quickly. "At you? What rubbish! Why should he?" He went on without waiting for an answer: "I say, please forgive me. I've forgotten your name already."

"It's Bradley . . . John Bradley."

"I won't forget it again. Mine's Lacey . . . Martin Lacey."

"I knew that already. I heard it outside the Dean's office. I noticed you yesterday."

"And I noticed you. That's odd. I suppose we were both of us rather . . . well . . . out of it. So it's just as it should be, isn't it? A bit of good luck. Shall we make a start? I've got the book here. One reflects the skin of the gluteal region first, I suppose; but before we do that we must turn this old gentleman over. Just give me a hand. Ugh! I really don't like touching him. Sort of sacrilege isn't it? But I suppose

one soon gets over feelings of that kind. Come along! Let's have a shot at it."

Until that moment John had not even noticed the subject. When he did, the sight gave him a shock. There on the zinc-topped table lay a shrunken simulacrum of old "Dr." Mortimore: the same sunken chops, the same wrinkled dome of forehead, the same sparse white beard. Apart from the legs, which were both whole, he would have sworn to it. Lacey noticed his gasp of astonishment.

"What's the matter?" he said.

John laughed. "I'd not seen him before. He's just like an old man I knew."

"Well, you never *do* know, you know, or you used not to, anyway. Do you realize that old Sir Astley Cooper, the surgeon—my father knew him—once froze the blood of a Royal Commission by saying that there was no person, whatever his worldly place, whom he could not dissect if he would? Still, I'm sorry about your uncle."

"He wasn't my uncle. And, thank God, he'd a wooden leg."

Lacey laughed. "Then your conscience, if anatomists have any in their anatomy, is clear. That Cooper must have been a devil of a fellow. Do you know, every day of his life he got up at six and dissected till eight before seeing his private patients and going to Guy's? Then, at two, he lectured on anatomy at St. Thomas's, did operations till seven, bolted his

dinner and slept half an hour and then did a round of visits. He must have been like this chap Lister that everyone's quarrelling over. What a life! Yet he lived to be seventy-three, which is more than either of us is likely to do. What's more, if we go on jabbering like this, Bradley, we shall get no work done. I'll toss you for the first incision."

(vi)

That afternoon a friendship was begun. It had lasted and been, perhaps, the most important of all in John Bradley's life. Why had he and Lacey become such great friends? he sometimes asked himself. Was it simply because old Diggle had happened (or designed) to throw them together, or was there more than chance in their friendship? People often spoke loosely about "the mutual attraction of opposites." In this case, it seemed as if there were something to be said for it. John was black as night, clumsily-made, uncouth, slow-spoken: Lacey fair, with a skin as delicate as a girl's, a body shaped with a physical distinction that seemed to make every movement precise, graceful and easy, and a quick tongue that never stumbled for a word. Though more lightly made, he was as tall as John and probably as strong, but with a tensile strength, resembling that of steel, while John's was that of a heavy iron casting.

And the difference between their two bodies found its counterpart in their minds. Martin Lacey was the first human being John had ever met who had been blessed from his childhood with the advantages of a cultured environment, who "knew things" and enjoyed wide interests, not because he had painfully acquired them, but because they were part of the atmosphere he was accustomed to breathe and had come to him without being sought. He was an only child of one of the great families of Liberal Unitarians, who, together with the Quakers, had made fortunes in industry; who had used their wealth well, and now constituted an intellectual enclave in the civic life of North Bromwich. Unlike most of their wealthy neighbours, these people had not been satisfied with the mere making of money. Nor was their outlook parochial: though the state of North Bromwich was their first concern, it extended beyond the familiar limits of the Black Country's smoke into the wider sphere of domestic and international politics. They had made friends and contracted marriages and corresponded with people of their own class and creed in all the great cities of England. They bought pictures, built music-rooms, amassed libraries, of which they were proud, and maintained an eager and vivid interest in the latest development of the Arts and Sciences, which they subsidized liberally but without ostentation; they were, in short, the fine flower of the new industrial aristocracy.

Until he met Martin Lacey John had no idea that

such people existed. When he realized the incalculable advantages which the mere fact of having been born and bred in such a society conferred on his friend, he felt envious, if not actually resentful. It opened his eyes to what seemed to him a radical injustice in the condition of humanity: that not merely the knowledge which he had sweated blood to acquire, but the power of acquiring it easily, should have come to Lacey as a birthright. He could see from the first that there was no question of competing with him. However grimly he toiled, he knew he lacked something fundamental that Lacey possessed, and that his friend could easily outstrip him without exerting himself. There were "no two ways about it," as George Munslow would say: Martin Lacey was in every respect the finer human animal. To see that, John thought, one need only observe the difference between the delicate deftness with which Lacey used his dissecting-scalpel and the clumsiness of his own hands. It was just as well to admit the fact and have done with it.

And that was not difficult: for although Lacey's brilliant aloofness, his quick, confusing wit, which caught up a word like a swallow hawking flies in mid-air and was gone, and his physical distinction (which, after all, wasn't his fault) made him perhaps the least popular man of his "year," he never inflicted a sense of his superiority on John Bradley or made him feel small. They had started their student life together as comrades, and ill-matched as they seemed, they were

friends. For the sake of that friendship John was ready to share a reflected unpopularity. Yet he wasn't, he thought, when he came to consider it afterwards, unpopular. He wasn't sufficiently important to be liked or disliked. He toiled on his clumsy way, just managing to keep his head above water, in Lacey's foaming wake.

Only once, during the first year of study, did he find himself placed in a position of prominence. It was at one of the tutorial classes on osteology which were given by the Dean in the dissecting-room. Mr. Borden was not merely a competent anatomist but a brilliant draughtsman, and was never happier than on these informal occasions when, in the middle of a circle of students perched on stools, he could display his virtuosity by dashing off sketches of bones on a black-board, denoting the origins and insertions of muscles with coloured chalks which brought an odd note of gaiety into those sombre surroundings. At the end of his demonstration he usually devoted a few minutes to a quick-fire of questions demanding swift answers, an amusing but sometimes a rather embarrassing game. Out of a kindly anxiety to spare John Bradley's feelings—for he, apart from Lacey, was the only person who knew his history—the Dean had usually asked him no questions; but that afternoon (John remembered it all his life) he had turned his benevolent eyes on him suddenly and tossed him one of the small bones of the wrist.

"Now, Mr. Bradley," he said. "We've not heard your voice for a long time. What's that?"

John caught the bone and answered him at once, without looking:

"Trapezoid, sir."

"A good shot, Mr. Bradley. Right or Left?"

"The left, sir."

"A clever guess, Mr. Bradley. Of course the odds are even, like *Rouge et Noir*, and you've won. Left it is. But I notice you haven't looked at it yet. That wasn't so clever." The class laughed. "I wonder how long your system will work. Let's try it again." He tossed him another bone. "What is this?"

"The Scaphoid, sir."

"Of course. The shape's unmistakable and the name describes it. But Left or Right, Mr. Bradley: that is the question." He smiled. John smiled too:

"Left again, sir."

"Now how, if I may make so bold, did you arrive at that conclusion? Or are you still guessing?"

"I didn't guess, sir. I felt it. I know the shape of it."

The Dean looked at him quizzically: "As a matter of fact you were right. What about this?"

"The Cuneiform, sir."

"Which side?"

"Right, this time, sir."

"And right again. This is interesting."

He handed John a number of small bones of the

wrist and ankle one after another—Semilunar, Trapezium, Unciform, Cuboid, Navicular, Astragalus—and each time the answer was right.

“Well, I think we’ve gone over our time, gentlemen,” he said at last. “That’s enough for to-day.”

In the cloakroom, where John Bradley was washing his hands, the Dean laid a hand on his shoulder.

“A good demonstration, Mr. Bradley. I confess I thought you were guessing. The laugh was against me, but all the same I apologize. How did you do it?”

John blushed. “I can’t say, sir, exactly. You see I know bones. That’s what ‘Dr.’ Mortimer taught me: to keep on handling and feeling things. He learnt about bones in that way himself, on a desert island.”

The Dean laughed. “An odd school of anatomy; but what he told you was right. I’m beginning to think I misjudged that old gentleman.”

“He had wonderful hands, sir.” John said.

“So it seems. I wonder what else he taught you, Mr. Bradley.”

“Not much, sir, I’m afraid.”

It was only too true, alas! but the little he had learnt, supplementing his constant labour, enabled him at the end of his second year to scrape through the examination of the Society of Apothecaries. Lacey, of course, took honours in the more stringent test of the Royal College of Surgeons.

CHAPTER FOUR

(1)

DR. BRADLEY opened his eyes and sat up with a start. The tinkle of a bell had broken in on his thoughts; and his body, trained to alertness by years of servitude to that stimulus, had reacted instantly, though his mind was still far away. He listened for a moment intently. It would be as well, before he got up and went to the door, to be sure that the sound was not imaginary. The tinkle was not repeated; so he concluded thankfully that it must have come from the bell of a passing bicycle. He looked at his watch. It was only half-past nine and the fire was still bright. "I must have dozed off for a minute or two," he thought. It was odd how, as one grew older, one tended to do that so easily. Odd, but not unpleasant. People called it "living in the past."

He had been thinking or, possibly, dreaming, as he remembered now, of the dissecting-room at North Bromwich and of the triumphant day on which he knew he had passed his second examination. It surprised him, looking backward, to recall the genuine regret with which he had left that noisome chamber. During those two years he had become not merely

used to it, but attached to it. By the end of the first the little collection of freshmen which, to begin with, had seemed to be composed of alien if not hostile units, had "shaken down" into a friendly, neighbourly society. Even the tide of unpopularity which had set in at first against Lacey—and because of their friendship against himself—had turned. After all, his friend had done nothing to deserve dislike apart from possessing a brighter brain and a more distinguished body than his competitors. Lacey was neither a prig nor a snob: otherwise, as they realized, he would certainly never have chosen an ordinary chap like John Bradley for a friend. If he didn't exactly "mix" with that easy-going, rackety, foul-mouthed crew, it wasn't because he looked down on them or on their pursuits, but simply because their rather primitive interests and pleasures were not his; because, even if he had been able to enjoy them, he was aware of others much more attractive, as well as more valuable in the attainment of his ambitions.

For he was fiercely ambitious: not out of any desire for money (which would be his in any case) nor even for personal renown, but rather because he happened to have been brought up amongst people who were intellectually curious and alive to the exciting developments of the age of ferment in which they lived—developments only made possible by the enormous outpouring of wealth and spiritual energy that had flowed (along with other things less desirable) from

the Industrial Revolution and the Mid-Victorian peace. Martin Lacey's home in Alvaston had become a sort of local clearing-house for ideas. It was frequented by many distinguished men. John Bright, Richard Cobden and Gladstone were political friends of his father's. Matthew Arnold, Thomas Huxley and Charles Kingsley stayed with him when they came to North Bromwich inspecting schools or lecturing at the Institute; he had known Burne-Jones and bought his schoolboy drawings, and his trade, as a manufacturer of optical glass, had brought him into contact and correspondence with all sorts of scientists, astronomers, physicists, surgeons, and wealthy amateurs such as Joseph Lister, the wine-merchant, the father of the Edinburgh surgeon whose name John Bradley heard so often on his friend's lips.

When Lacey first asked him to visit his home in Alvaston, John had shied at the prospect, being conscious of his own uncouthness, and evaded this invitation, until his friend chaffed him into admitting why he was hedging.

"And do you really think," Lacey answered scornfully, "that civilized people care a brass farthing about clothes? You needn't be scared of my father anyway. Even if he's at home—which he probably won't be—he'll be far too deeply sunk in his thoughts to take any notice of you, and my mother's the gentlest creature that ever lived. Come along . . . don't be so ridiculous."

And indeed, though he often went with his friend to the house in Alvaston, Dr. Bradley's memory of Martin Lacey's father was indistinct and fugitive: no more than a vague impression of an elderly figure, extraordinarily frail and elusive compared with his son, with a black skull-cap and a pointed white beard above a Gladstonian collar and a tie of terra-cotta silk slipped through a gold ring; while the impression of his friend's mother was even vaguer, being less that of a figure than of a dove-grey presence and a gentle smile. Neither of them, as Lacey had said, took much notice of him: he was their son's friend, and that was enough.

But the house he remembered vividly—not only because it was the most imposing he had ever entered, but also for its quietness. It was a low, stuccoed Regency building, with a square porch supported by fluted pillars. When one opened the front door one looked down the length of a wide corridor to an expanse of green lawn bordered by brilliant beds of geraniums edged with lobelias, and the corridor was so thickly carpeted that even hob-nailed boots made no sound. Its walls were hung with pre-Raphaelite drawings and pictures, and one room on the right at the end of it, overlooking the lawn, was even quieter than the rest. This was Mr. Lacey's library, which his friend William Morris had furnished for him with tapestry hangings and curtains printed in madder and indigo. There was only one picture here: a

painting by Rossetti of a girl whose white skin and colouring of pallid gold suggested a subtilized version of Laura Munslow. The walls were lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves, and the books that filled them, in their bindings of pale calf with gilt lettering, diffused an amber radiance like that of wintry sunshine. It was, John Bradley thought then, and still thought as he remembered it, the most beautiful, the most tender room he had ever set eyes on. He felt almost indignant when Martin's irreverent laughter broke in on his rapture.

"Come along," he said, dragging him away, "I've something better than this to show you. It's all very pretty, but it belongs to the past. And it's not the past we're interested in. Now this *is* a room if you like! No poetical dreaming here: just cold facts, my boy, facts!"

It was a disused orangery, attached to the house by a glazed, stone-flagged passage, which Lacey had taken possession of as a study and a laboratory. French windows opened out on to the spreading lawns admitting wafts of sweet air and flutings of summer-muted bird-song; but the interior was drenched in the familiar smell of alcohol and preservatives, and furnished with nothing but trestle-tables crowded with racks for retorts and test-tubes, a microscope, biological specimens in jars, glass trays for dissections, and piles of scribbled notebooks.

"This is where I've done all my work at home,"

Lacey said. "It's delicious in summer, but, by Jove, it's icy in winter! No fear of falling asleep, I can tell you that. I daren't leave any books here at night: the pages get damp. Come along, now, sit down"—he pushed over a kitchen chair—"and we'll talk about the future—all sorts of futures, mind you, not only our own."

They talked of the future: particularly of the future of surgery, which was Lacey's prime passion. He did most of the talking. Though John Bradley tried to follow him he couldn't help thinking, from time to time, of the contrast between this airy, sunlit study and his own dark bedroom at the back of the "Cock and Magpie." No wonder Lacey's mind was freer and more expansive than his own.

"You see," Lacey was saying, "our real work, our clinical work, is only just beginning, and, by Jove, aren't we lucky to have been born when we were instead of ten years earlier! It's like having been born—politically born, I mean—at the time of the French Revolution or in the age of Elizabeth, when all the old knowledge blazed out in the light of the Renaissance of Learning and at the same moment the New World was discovered. A New World of Medicine is being born at this moment, and nobody—not even the men who've set foot on it—have the remotest idea what's in front of them. Like stout Cortez and all his men, staring at each other with a wild surmise. Some are merely gaping. The old doddering fellows who teach

us in North Bromwich don't care. The Dean does, just a bit, but he's too old, I'm afraid, to put up a fight—good man as he is. And as for the rest of the older men. . . . Look at Simpson-Lyle! A great surgeon, admittedly, with a world reputation; far and away the biggest name we have in North Bromwich. An Edinburgh man, too. He must have known Joseph Lister, but he fights antiseptic surgery tooth and nail and is none too scrupulous either. Look at Cartwright, the senior surgeon at Prince's—thank heaven he's due to retire! Now he's a University College man and knows Lister well, yet at the International Medical Congress in London this year, he joined Savory in his attack on him. Even boasted that Lister's results were no better than his own. The Frenchmen and Germans must have gasped when they heard him. But isn't it just like us English to produce the greatest scientist of this age, the only man in the world who's grasped the significance of Pasteur's discoveries, and then refuse to listen to him? London's pretty hard of hearing, but North Bromwich is stone deaf and blind and dumb into the bargain!"

"I know nothing of Lister," John Bradley said, "except that you're always talking about him. He's a friend of your father's, isn't he?"

"His father was. That's why I know all about him. The father was a delightful old man, a Quaker, all 'thees' and 'thous,' who was interested in microscope-lenses. They corresponded for years. His son, my

great man, was Professor of Surgery in Glasgow and then in Edinburgh. Now he's gone to King's College, London. Right into the den of lions, heaven help him!"

"Hasn't he something or other to do with Carbolic Acid?"

Lacey laughed. "That's the usual way of putting it. That's all he means to men like our Senior Surgeon. It's the principle of Lister's discoveries that's important, not his technique. Look here, John: we two are going to start 'dressing' together next week. I've never really blown up about this before, but if I don't let off steam I shall burst. Will you risk an explosion?"

John smiled. "I don't mind in the least. Go on and explode."

Lacey didn't explode. Yet, all his days, John Bradley remembered that moment. He could still see, with closed eyes, that tall, slender, elegant figure, restlessly moving about the old orangery with a pencil of chalk in his fingers; his brown hair dishevelled, his cheeks flushed with two patches of red, his azure eyes blazing. He could hear the crisply-articulated words pouring out of those rather thin lips in a rapid staccato. He had always known Lacey to be a man of quick temper; but there was nothing heated about his words now, though the mind from which they came, like the rest of him, seemed white-hot.

"Look here, first of all," he said: "this is a pamphlet by Erichsen, the author of the textbook of

Surgery we're supposed to use and in which we shall be examined. It's called *Hospitalism, and the Causes of Death after Operations*. Published only six years ago. He gives figures of the proportion of deaths after amputations in hospitals all over the world. Listen to this: Edinburgh Infirmary: forty-three per cent. Paris: fifty-eight. Zurich: forty-six. Vienna: forty-four. Then he goes on to speak of London. In four Metropolitan Hospitals: thirty-eight point three. After that he gives himself a pat on the back. 'In University College,' he says, 'a general mortality of twenty-six per cent can be considered a very satisfactory result!' A three to one chance. Satisfactory! I don't think our North Bromwich figures would be so good. More like Edinburgh, I imagine. Do you wonder that the poor devils we see in the 'out-patients' turn white and sick with terror when we tell them they ought to come into hospital? Would you like to face it yourself! Simpson, of Edinburgh, admits that a man laid on the operating-table in one of our surgical hospitals is exposed to more chances of death than a soldier at Waterloo. Isn't it pretty awful that there should be a whole group of mortal diseases just glibly called 'Hospitalism'?"

He laid the pamphlet aside and went on more calmly:

"That's what Joseph Lister felt when he came to Edinburgh. Forty-three per cent, remember! He saw these ghastly figures taken for granted and couldn't

accept it—any more than Newton accepted the apple's falling as a thing that just happened. Blood-poisoning, pyæmia, hospital gangrene, tetanus. . . . If you came in with a compound fracture or had a limb amputated, it was even odds that one of them would finish you off. If you'd only a simple fracture, with the skin unbroken, it would mend itself without forming a drop of pus, without any 'putrefaction,' as it was called. But why . . . why . . . *why*. . . ?

"Because, people said, in a compound fracture or an open wound, the oxygen in the air 'got at it,' or, if it wasn't oxygen, the 'miasms'—a good Greek word that means nothing in particular!—that float about hospital wards. Something certainly floated about them: a fellow not used to it couldn't put his nose inside them without feeling sick at the stench. The 'hospital odour' they called it, and left it at that. And then there was another odd thing. In the Glasgow Hospital, where Lister went as Professor, there were certain wards more deadly than others: some so deadly that they had to shut them up for months at a time or even demolish them as a bad job. All Lister could do was to try to keep his wounds clean. But his patients died just the same. His hospital patients. The private ones did quite reasonably well.

"You see, at that time, he hadn't heard of Pasteur. No surgeon in England had heard of him, and why on earth should they? Wasn't English surgery the best in the world, with Erichsen considering his twenty-six

per cent mortality 'satisfactory'? And Pasteur was only a chemist and a wretched Frenchman at that. Well, the Professor of Chemistry at Glasgow showed Lister Pasteur's papers. Quite casually—with the idea that they might throw some light on the problem of putrefaction that was worrying him so much. Light . . . John, it must have been like the great light that dazzled St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Before that he had only seen his enemy through a glass darkly. Now he saw him face to face.

"Lister isn't a chemist. I bet he found Pasteur's papers pretty hard going. Pasteur had been working on yeast-fermentation for a man who made alcohol from beet-root. Then he worked on vinegars, and the 'turning' of milk. And he found that none of these fermentations could take place without contact with air. But supposing you filtered the air through cotton-wool, or admitted it only through fine capillary tubes? Then, no fermentation. So what it came to was this: it *wasn't* simply the air that caused fermentation, but something suspended in the air that couldn't be seen. Pasteur began to work with the microscope. He found dust where none was visible to the naked eye. He found smaller things, specks, and rods, no more than a twenty-thousandth of an inch in diameter, that clung to the specks of dust. He isolated them and found they could cause fermentation. When they were not seen to be present under the microscope, no fermentation took place. They were living things, a source of new life,

of germination. So he called them Germs. They could live in air. In water or blood or milk they multiplied, but they couldn't live without oxygen. Different kinds of germs produced different results. If you heated them above a certain degree they died.

"But you can't roast or boil your patients; you can't filter the air in a ward or an operating-theatre. That's where your blessed carbolic acid comes in. It just happened that Lister had heard of its being used at Carlisle for deodorizing putrefied sewage and killing the eggs of parasites which infected the cattle that grazed on the sewage-farm. Would it kill Pasteur's germs of putrefaction too—or would it kill the living tissues to which you applied it and make matters worse? Well, a surgeon has to take risks, and when a man with a compound fracture has only an even chance of getting over it, the risk is worth taking. He swabbed out his mangled legs and his amputation-wounds with crude carbolic. When he'd done that and set the fractured bones in place, he put on another strong carbolic dressing, and he fastened that down, to keep out the germs in the air, with sheet-lead. And out of the first eleven cases he reported from Glasgow only one died. Nine per cent instead of forty! Not a single death in his wards—the foulest in the whole place—from pyæmia or hospital gangrene or tetanus in the nine months after he started. Five cases without a trace of supuration. Shouldn't that have convinced them?"

"It's all simple enough," John Bradley said, "and it

sounds convincing. Don't the figures speak for themselves?"

"Ah, it's not quite so simple as that. That was only the beginning. He had to feel his way and modify those first methods. Crude carbolic was, actually, too strong. It did kill living tissue. And to some people it's a poison when it's absorbed. Then, although he'd attacked the germs that were in the wound or on the skin round it, he hadn't dealt with the germ-laden dust in the air. Now he's invented a spray, and fills the whole theatre with a mist of carbolic solution. But as for figures convincing his colleagues . . . why, my dear John, they fell on him like wolves. They've persecuted him just as the Florentine church tortured Galileo. Out of jealousy more than obstinacy, I believe. It's a horrible thing to admit; but I think doctors and scientists generally are the most jealous men on earth. Even old Simpson, the man who invented chloroform—a famous man with no excuse for not being generous—sneered at him publicly and wrote anonymous letters to the Press against him. Then the Directors of the Glasgow Infirmary itself attacked him. When he came back to London, only four years ago, the very nurses in his own wards were put up to obstruct him. And here, in North Bromwich, is Cartwright teaching the same old dirty methods and looking on cases that go wrong as Acts of God, and lecturing to us about 'laudable pus,' as though any pus were laudable! And here's Simpson-Lyle, that great bloated,

insolent, foul-mouthed, foul-minded genius—you must grant him that—denying to this day that germs have anything whatever to do with disease! It's hopeless: I know that Joseph Lister's right, but we can't do anything about it but wait for the future. That's the tragedy. I'll lend you all these papers, and you can see for yourself. At any rate, now you know what *I* feel about it."

(II)

John Bradley took the sheaves of statistics and medical periodicals home with him. There were extracts from private letters too, which old Mr. Lister had piously copied and sent to Lacey's father. It was preaching to the converted; for his faith in the indisputable truth of any and every word his hero spoke needed no strengthening by reason. There were not merely long talks in the garden's summer dusk or the lamp-lit orangery, but enchanted evenings spent examining specimens under Lacey's microscope, Zeiss's latest masterpiece with an immersion-lens, which his father had given him. There the oddly-matched couple saw for themselves what no other North Bromwich students were encouraged to see: those virulent enemies that wrought their blind destruction unseen in man's blood and his tissues, the unidentified pathogenic bacteria. In the pursuit of these vague

and elementary researches, John Bradley limped and panted a long way behind his friend. He could not pretend to Lacey's speed of thought or his leaping imagination. At that time he could not even grasp the subject's significance. His ill-trained mind was already embarrassed and crammed to confusion with new material of greater importance to himself: the knowledge which, if he could retain enough of it, would "get him over" his next examination, which Lacey would take like a hurdler in his stride.

Yet those summer evenings were precious; partly because his adoration for Lacey always made him happy in his company; partly too because the stucco house at Alvaston contained and nourished a life of such pure graciousness. When he left it at night and trudged home through the empty streets to the city's centre, where the housebreakers worked night and day by the light of naphtha-flares on the great Improvement Scheme, he felt like an uneasy ghost returning to the grave. He knew that a life such as the Laceys lived could never be his. He knew equally well that the life of the "Cock and Magpie" would not be his either. Somewhere betwixt and between the two his future life lay. He had no dread of this humble mediocrity. If he accepted it he was still "flying high"—as Mr. Laxton would have put it. And the contrast between the Laceys' house and the "Cock and Magpie" saved him at least from one catastrophe. There was no longer any question of his falling in love with Laura

Munslow and becoming engaged to her with her parents' enthusiastic approval. But for his friendship with Lacey and the new scale of values the house in Alvaston taught him, this might easily have happened. The day foreshadowed by old "Dr." Mortimore had arrived: he had begun to "look around."

This was natural enough. Women played a considerable part in the thoughts and speech (if less in the lives) of his fellow-students, and the opposite sex was not idealized. When men gathered together in corners of the dissecting-room or sat swinging their legs on the table in Diggle's shag-infested den, the bulk of their talk was honestly and blatantly bawdy. Promiscuity was in the tradition of student-life. In the nature of things they knew more about women physically than young men of their age in any other calling, and this anatomical knowledge, acquired in circumstances that were neither romantic nor appetizing, gave a hearty material grossness to their point of view. John Bradley himself had lost a good deal of his rustic timidity. He was no longer a boy but a virile young man with a black moustache and abundant whiskers, but he was still so deferent that he would have felt himself superior and priggish if he had dissociated himself from his comrades' attitude. A fellow like Lacey could take his own line without giving a damn what they thought of him. He was strong enough in his white-hot idealism to continue to be his puritan self without any consideration for public

opinion. But John wasn't strong, and he wasn't a puritan either, and the proximity of Laura Munslow's milky-white skin began to trouble him.

Not that Laura herself gave him any pronounced encouragement. Anything so positive as attempting to allure him by coquetry would have been out of character with her picturesque languor. But there she was, all the time, in the background of his thoughts and sometimes very much in the foreground, affording a kind of encouragement by her sheer passivity, and exciting a sort of protective emotion by a frailty that contrasted so strongly with his own abundant strength. By this time he had become accepted as "one of the family." George Munslow had taken to him from the first and in his muddled way was proud of his erudition, while Mrs. Munslow's first defensive frigidity had warmed to a motherly interest. She now regarded him more as a son than as an unwelcome infliction of her husband's; she called him "Johnny," and had long since abandoned her dread of him as a threat to her daughter's virginity. She knitted socks for him and Laura did his darning. The whole atmosphere of the "Cock and Magpie" had reached such a state of familiar domesticity that Mrs. Munslow no longer stiffened with alarm when she saw John sitting by Laura's side in the evening while she darned his socks and he teased her with sly whispers; and Laura herself was no longer shy with him or afraid to smile.

Mrs. Munslow even took him into her confidence on the subject of Laura's anæmia—what was the good of having a young doctor in the house if you didn't make use of him?—and John, flattered, prescribed the nauseous mixture of iron and sulphate of magnesia which was the staple remedy for that all-too-common complaint in the Prince's Pharmacopœia. Laura complained that it blackened her teeth, and showed them to him. They were beautiful regular teeth, and her rather bloodless lips had a tender sweetness of line that made him want to kiss them, if only he had dared and her mother had not been looking. His prescription did her good too. It brought colour into the cheeks above her white neck and brightness into her eyes; it even quickened her languor with a new and astonishing vivacity; and this access of beauty touched him the more because it was of his own creation, while Laura, on her side, assumed towards him a tender, proprietary air which he found touching too, because he was lonely and had no real friend except Lacey, who lived, after all, on a different and difficult plane; and it was pleasant to play at being adopted by a human creature (and above all by a young woman) whose society wasn't a strain to the intellect, and who made no demands on one and responded so frankly and innocently to admiration and small, teasing attentions.

Often, now, when he went upstairs to his dim back-bedroom to work, he would find a mute reminder of Laura Munslow's interest: a pair of darned socks or a

newly-ironed shirt laid out tidily and prominently on the bed, more rarely a jug or jam-pot of flowers among the books on his working-table. George Munslow's farmers and drovers often brought him in posies that carried with them a breath of Shropshire gardens; but sometimes, John suspected, these flowers had been bought in the market and put on his table secretly, and, as he sat working, the room seemed to be filled with the sweet and quiet presence of Laura herself. When he thought of her, herself a wilted flower, revived by his admiration no less than by his medicine, he was reminded of a series of pictures in the new Art Gallery that presented the story of Pygmalion and Galatea, in which the marble of a nude statue gradually glowed with a warm and living loveliness. But there was another picture that also reminded him of Laura Munslow: the golden Rossetti girl above the mantel-piece in Mr. Lacey's library. And the image of the Laura he knew and was occasionally tempted to desire grew pale and rather forlorn in the amber glow of that rarefied air. When he set her against that background the values changed. She was no longer the quickening rosy Galatea, but a little anæmic girl whose father kept a pot-house. It was a drastic and somewhat humiliating corrective. He turned his thoughts to his work.

How would life have gone with him, Dr. Bradley reflected, if he had followed the natural inclination of youth, if he had permitted his fancy to be caught by

Laura Munslow and had married her? There was no doubt in his mind that, if he had proposed to her, she would have jumped at it. Would she, perhaps, have been sitting opposite him now, with her knitting in her lap: a spare old woman, subacid, flat-chested like her mother, with a sharp voice and a North Bromwich accent? That was one of the vague, unprofitable speculations which must often occur to elderly men who, like most men living, had failed to marry the woman who had first attracted them. And, in any case, thank God, he hadn't married her. He did not even know if she had married anyone else or if she was still alive. She was of the type that often, in those old days, contracted tuberculosis. A doctor instinctively thinks of his people in terms of his profession: the attitude is detached, but not callous, and there is nothing in it with which he need reproach himself. After all, the story was more than fifty years old, and there is nothing in the world quite so dead as a love that has not reached fruition. Still, he wished Laura Munslow well. He hoped she had lived a happy life, or died happily, if she were dead. When one is old, he thought, most far-off things and people seem small and vaguely (though not distressingly) pitiful: a little blurred, as though seen through a mist of all the tears one has shed or withheld.

(III)

Indeed, during that third year, when he might so easily have "landed himself," John Bradley had no time to spare for any sentimental adventure. Both Lacey and he were "dressing" at the Prince's Hospital: Martin Lacey for their benevolent friend Borden, and John for Lacey's bugbear, the senior surgeon, Cartwright. Lacey, though fretful and impatient, was fairly happy in his job. Though the Dean moved too slowly to suit his taste, he was an extremely competent surgeon as well as a good anatomist, and the only "honorary" who, from the first, had set up as a pure consultant without dabbling in general practice. Though he seemed to them elderly, he was actually in the prime of his career, a man of fifty. He had a mechanical mind which took pride in deft workmanship; his scalpel moved with the same bold, swift precision as the chalk with which he made his blackboard sketches, and his mind, as Lacey rejoiced to find, was not as yet completely "ossified"—in other words, he was prepared to swallow the methods, if not the whole doctrine, of his fellow-student, Lister. His technique, by the standards of those days, was reasonably antiseptic. He operated with rolled-up shirt-sleeves, scrubbed his fine hands, of which he was proud, and used, in addition to the carbolic lotion in which, from time to time, he dipped his instruments, large quantities

of boiled water: a practice he had learnt and imitated, empirically, from the gynæcological practice of Simpson-Lyle—an origin which was sufficient in itself to make Lacey furious.

As to the truth of the “germ-theory” itself he was still unconvinced and uninquisitive. He was a clinical surgeon: it was no part of his job, he considered, to bolster up theories. Yet at the back of his mind he was inclined to suspect that there “might be something in it.” That was why, as a matter of routine, he employed a hand-spray at which one of his dressers must pump till his arms gave out, bedewing the air of the theatre, its occupants’ clothes and eyes, and all that was exposed of the unconscious patient, with a carbolic mist—or, when the wretched thing clogged, deluging them with jets of liquid that blanched their skins and numbed them. His whole method was, in fact, a compromise between the old and the new. On the whole, by the mercy of God, he was a successful surgeon. But if a case “went wrong,” or a patient complained of much pain, he was ready at once to fall back on a septic hot bread-poultice—the mere thought of which made Lacey shiver—which he always called “a comforting application.”

John Bradley’s chief, Cartwright, was an older man than his colleague. He had learnt his surgery from Robert Liston, in London, in the years before chloroform came to be used, when the first essentials of a surgeon’s craft were swiftness of hand and rapid deci-

sion. He was known as a "lightning operator," and endowed, like his teacher, with such prodigious manual strength that he could amputate a thigh, as he boasted, with only one assistant, wielding knives and saws with his right hand while he compressed the main artery with his left. He had enormous courage, too, and was always ready to attempt the forlorn hopes of surgical emergency. The wards did not interest him: the theatre was his battlefield. If he turned it into a shambles strewn with the victims of his daring, he was not perturbed, being convinced that whatever happened, he had done as much for them as any man living could. If a case "went wrong" afterwards it was God's affair, not his.

His person reflected his practice. He was a short, stocky man, with a grizzled, rough-hewn face and cold grey spectacled eyes. His manner was brusque and taciturn. When he spoke, his words were few and clumsily chosen, though salted, occasionally, with a coarse, sardonic humour which made nurses blush and delighted the listening students. As he operated, he swore to himself under his breath. In his dress, as in everything else, he was deliberately old-fashioned. He wore pale-grey trousers that narrowed below to tighten on his calves, an ill-starched collar embraced by a folded cravat, and a black frock-coat with unusually short tails, which he flapped, as he restlessly prowled to and fro, with his arms clasped behind him. He was hardly ever still, and always appeared impatient; and

when he did stand still for a moment his thick body seemed to radiate suppressed physical energy. It was their recognition of this vital force, of his courage, of his good humour and of a personality so clear-cut and consistent that there was nothing in it to puzzle them, that made Cartwright more popular with his students than any other surgeon in North Bromwich.

John Bradley had taken to Cartwright from the first, in spite of the prejudices Lacey had implanted against him, and he had taken to John, too: there was something that appealed to his downright nature in this strong, raw, big-boned, inelegant country lad with no nonsense about him. John benefited by this liking. Cartwright singled him out for particular attention in his wards and in the theatre; he allowed him to assist him in operations and perform the unenviable task of dressing his patients; and these flattering favours, together with his natural inclination to naïve loyalties, soon convinced him that Lacey's fulminations were biased and that his chief was a bigger man than his friend would admit.

There was only one theatre at the Prince's in those days: a small room, with a wooden floor sprinkled with sawdust, and white-washed, unwashable walls. There was a fire-grate, on which a black kettle perpetually sang, in one corner. On one side a couple of windows, glazed with soot-grimed opaline glass, overlooked the mortuary and admitted a mournful light. No running water was "laid on." The surgeon and dressers could

wash their hands or their instruments, if they were so minded, in tin basins of luke-warm water faintly purpled with Condy's fluid, which stood on a long side-table that also carried an assortment of dressings, spools of silk and catgut, sutures, and a wide-mouthed jar full of sponges to be used as swabs.

In the midst of the room stood the operating-table, a zinc-topped slab on trestles, prophetically resembling those that sustained the subjects in the dissecting-room; and attached to the wall next the fire, in front of which Cartwright would stand and flap his coat-tails until the patient was "under," ran a line of hooks, from one of which was suspended his operating-coat, an old garment of the same cut as the one he wore, but thread-bare with ten years of use and stiffened by ten years' accumulations of pus and coagulated blood, in the breast-pocket of which he kept the favourite scalpels and bistouries which the theatre-sister had wiped moderately clean after his last operation.

Cartwright was very proud of this coat and boasted of its age, and John Bradley himself respected it as a symbol of surgical prowess which had been associated with more than two hundred amputations. When the patient was ready, Cartwright turned up his sleeves and his collar and washed his hands with soap and water. He never used a nail-brush; for a nail-brush, vigorously used, might scratch his skin, and, though the germ-theory was rubbish, he realized that more than one surgeon had lost his life through blood-poisoning

contracted from an infected scratch. Then he took his instruments out of his pocket (he sometimes demonstrated how sharp a scalpel was by cutting a hair with it), put on his reading-spectacles, blew his nose heartily with a bandana handkerchief, and started to work. While he operated he snorted and muttered through his moustache over the wound. When he wanted to tie a cut artery the house-surgeon would hand him a length of silk or whipcord, a wisp of which he always carried in his button-hole. If he dropped his scalpel on the floor, the dresser picked it up for him. He might wipe it perfunctorily before he went on using it. He might not.

Yet he was a good operator: a "three-handed man," neat and swift and never in doubt or unready to change his tactics in face of an emergency. "I may be wrong, but I have no doubts," was one of his favourite sayings. And he was, by the hospital standards of those days, a successful surgeon. The mortality of his amputations and compound fractures was in the neighbourhood of Erichsen's "satisfactory" thirty-three per cent: one case in three, on an average, "went wrong" after operation. But there were dreadful occasions on which nearly all the cases in a ward "went wrong" simultaneously, when an epidemic of pyæmia or erysipelas broke out, as it were spontaneously, and swept through the beds like fire.

Then, and only then, Cartwright would give an order for the windows of the ward to be opened, not

because he believed in fresh air, but because of the accepted theory that "hospital diseases" were a mysterious result of over-crowding—and Cartwright was so popular as a surgeon that his beds were always full. This infusion of fresh air, though it failed to check the spread of sepsis, did one thing at least: it modified the mawkish odour that clung sickeningly in those days to every surgical ward: "the good old surgical stink," as Cartwright called it.

It was a miracle, Dr. Bradley often thought afterwards, that his figures of mortality from septic infection were so low. Dressers passed from one case to the next without dreaming of washing their hands. Few wounds healed "by first intention," so what did it matter? The same instruments, scissors and forceps and probe, were used for dressing every patient, septic or clean, the same sponges to clean up their wounds. The nurses at the old Prince's, were not, with a few exceptions, women of much education or high intelligence: the influence of Florence Nightingale had not as yet leavened the nursing profession in North Bromwich, and none could blame them for their defects—they did as they were bid and ran great risks to themselves in doing it. Nobody, indeed, was consciously to blame. That was the terrible part of it.

One incident John Bradley never forgot. It happened in one of those unfortunate periods when case after case flared up like a *feu de joie*. The situation did not discompose Cartwright: the Angel of Death

was abroad in the land and would take his toll; but it did profoundly disturb his house-surgeon, a serious young man named Grant, who had come from King's College Hospital. Grant was by no means converted to the cult of antisepsis, but the spectacle of the approaching holocaust and the sense of his personal impotence had got on his nerves and his conscience. On his evening round he suddenly plucked up courage and dressed every suppurating wound in the ward with a mild and totally ineffective carbolic lotion. Next morning, when Cartwright arrived in an expansive mood and bustled in, flapping his coat-tails and inhaling the familiar air, a strange smell met his nostrils. He halted suddenly, sniffing to right and left like a hound. The pack of students that followed him stood and sniffed. He blew his nose with his bandana handkerchief and sniffed even more violently. He went red in the face and turned on the house-surgeon.

"Mr. Grant, Mr. Grant," he roared, "has anyone been fiddling with Mr. Borden's damned spray in this ward?"

"No, sir, no," Grant answered hurriedly. "It really . . . well, it just struck me last night, sir, that, with all these cases turning out as they are, it could do no possible harm to try a mild antiseptic dressing."

"No harm? No harm?" Cartwright snorted. "How can you know it will do no harm? Has it done any good, Mr. Grant? That is rather the question. Has your carbolic acid brought down their fever? Has

it stopped suppuration? Has it relieved any pain? Are they any the better for this experiment of yours, Mr. Grant?"

"Well . . . I really can't say they are, sir," the house-surgeon admitted humbly. "Apart from that fractured femur in the end bed, who died in the night, I should say they are much the same. They're none of them really *worse*, sir," he added feebly.

"You may thank the Almighty for that, sir," Cartwright said grimly. "Please remember you're not in London now, Mr. Grant, and note that in future I do not wish you to try meddlesome experiments on my patients. This is a surgical ward, not a vivisection laboratory." He turned on the sister. "Throw open the windows," he growled, "and let out this damned chemical stink. And you, Mr. Grant, take off those dressings at once and burn them and put on comforting hot fomentations. I'll come round again and look at them myself in half an hour's time." He stalked out of the ward with the string of students behind him, still muttering something about "this damned antiseptic nonsense."

John described the incident to Lacey when they met for lunch in the pub called "The Trees" on the opposite side of the road to the hospital. Lacey was so furious about it that he could not eat.

"Of course Grant's carbolic lotion did no good, and he ought to have known it," he raved. "That was simply shutting the door when the horse had been

stolen. Too late . . . too late! Those poor devils were done for from the moment when Cartwright made his first incision and sent them back with open wounds to a ward that was reeking with infection. Experiments—meddlesome experiments, indeed! What nobody in this miserable place seems to have the sense to grasp is the fact that antisepsis isn't a matter of using carbolic. It isn't a drug—it's a method. My old man, though he's full of good intentions and I like him enormously, is nearly as bad. His mind's what you might call 'ajar' to new ideas, but they terrify him, and the first sight of one through the chink sends him scampering back to his 'comforting applications.' He's a pretty good surgeon too. If only Borden had Cartwright's courage and Cartwright had Borden's imagination, something might be done. But nothing *will* be done till we get younger men on the staff, John. There's a North Bromwich fellow called Lloyd Moore, the son of the old professor of Anatomy. He ought to be coming on in a year or two, but then we shall be gone. And now . . . Well, it's utterly heart-breaking. I've a damned good mind to pack up and do my last year in London at King's."

"For God's sake don't even speak of such an idea," John pleaded.

Although their work in the hospital separated them, they were still reading together in the evening and talking and comparing their notes. Lacey's were full of acute observation, but his were rapidly scribbled and

almost illegible ("That shows I was meant to be a surgeon," he said. "My writing's abominable, in the medical tradition.") while John's, which were bald and ill-expressed, were a model of neatness written in the fine copperplate script that Mr. Laxton had taught him. They talked over their cases and discussed their chiefs' teachings, and even Lacey was forced occasionally to admit that Cartwright, for all his obstinacy, had a brilliant mechanical mind and, apart from one subject, was well worth listening to, though John found it difficult to reconcile his conflicting loyalties to his master and to his friend. They talked a good deal, as young men will, about life in general, though, oddly enough, they never talked about love: that was a subject for which there was no room as yet in Lacey's austere and active mind, and John sometimes wished he could partake of that emotional immunity. All through their third year he was haunted by the fear that Lacey would fulfil his threat and leave North Bromwich. It stunned him, but did not surprise him, when, at the end of it, his friend informed him that he had made up his mind and was going to King's.

"That means I shall never see you again," he said mournfully.

"What nonsense you talk, John. London's not at the other end of the world, and I shall often come home to Alvaston. Besides, when I'm qualified, I intend to practice in North Bromwich. After all, it's my home."

"I shall miss you more than you realize," John told him. "We've worked such a lot together. In fact I'm hanged if I know how I shall ever get through my 'final' if you're away."

"We'll write to each other."

"I'm no hand at writing letters."

"Well, it won't be for long, as I've told you already. I shall take the first M.R.C.S. next July. When I'm through that I shall probably start reading at once for the Fellowship. I may go to France and Germany for a bit: fancy meeting Pasteur face to face! And there's that man Koch in Breslau, who discovered the Anthrax bacillus. It's only since I decided to cut and go that I've felt my wings."

"There you are—and you'll fly away from me, right out of sight. When you do come back to North Bromwich you'll be too important to look at me. You'll be the great surgeon—and me nothing but a grubby little general practitioner in some god-forsaken hole like Wednesford or Lower Sparkdale. I can't stop your going: I know that. I don't even want to. But it's an awful blow to me."

"Why don't you come with me, John?"

"The money won't reach it. Besides, it would mean a new start for me. It's harder for me to adapt myself than it is for you. I've got used to Prince's, and the Prince's people are used to me. If I went to London you'd only find me smelling my way back to North Bromwich, like a cat."

Lacey's face brightened suddenly. "Yes, isn't that an odd thing?" he said. "How do they do it? Is it really by smell? It isn't by sight, because they find their way just the same when they've been sent away in a box. It may be by smell: they've much keener noses than we have . . ."

"They'd find their way quickly enough like that to Cartwright's wards?"

"Or is it by means of some other sense we know nothing about," Lacey went on seriously: "some muscular sense of direction that gives them an absolute North to steer by—just as some musical people claim to have absolute pitch? You see people simply swallow phenomena of this kind. Nobody ever examines them. If you hear a thing often enough you just take it to be true. As a matter of fact I have only your word for it, John, that a cat *can* find its way home over a distance so great as that. Supposing I took a cat with me . . ."

"Oh, damn you and your cats!" John Bradley broke in suddenly.

Lacey stared at him in surprise. "I'm sorry, Johnny," he said.

(IV)

Had he really been sorry? Dr. Bradley asked himself. At this distance of years it did not seem to matter

much whether he had been or hadn't, though, at the time, Lacey's going to King's had seemed like the end of all things. He did keep his promise. Every fortnight or so he wrote John a lengthy letter, so hurriedly scrawled that they were difficult to read. They were all about Joseph Lister, and full of meticulous descriptions of his new ways of preparing antiseptic gauzes and sutures. There was a burst of hot indignation from Lacey when a German named Bruns, of Tübingen, attacked his idol in a polemic entitled *Fort mit dem Spray*. There were exhaustive transcriptions of case-sheets—but hardly a word of himself. It seemed impossible to keep up a friendship at a distance merely by exchanging scientific ideas. The correspondence on John's side languished; then, finally, dried up.

After all, his main purpose in life at that moment was to get through his final examination, and details of new work of the kind in which Lacey exulted were not going to help him much. He was tackling Medicine and Midwifery as well as Surgery, confronted by a press of new subjects which he must master, somehow or other, before next July. Life was poorer without Lacey's company, but confusingly, suffocatingly full. He made no new friends. All the students of his year were already divided into little coteries of their own, perfectly friendly to him but useless, so he worked alone. His memories of that time consisted of little more than a routine of dreary and

endless drudgery: getting up in the morning by candle-light (there was, apparently, no summer that year); snatching a hurried breakfast flavoured with fumes of stale beer in the kitchen of the "Cock and Magpie"; trudging westwards to "Prince's" over the ice-glazed cobbles; taking "histories" and examining patients in the Medical wards, where he "clerked" for a benevolent but undistinguished physician named Hoskins; making post-mortems, at the risk of his life, on Cartwright's failures, and trudging home through the dusk—or fogs that resembled dusk—to read and read and read, with a blanket tucked round his cold feet, until his head swam and his eyes blurred and he could see no longer.

Only one impression detached itself vividly from this devoted monotony: the memory of a particular night on which—with a bluebottle swarm of elusive facts still buzzing in his sleepy brain—he had been roused from his shake-down on a sofa in the Residents' Room, and had tumbled out, bleary-eyed, into the silent streets to attend his first midwifery case.

The part of North Bromwich which the hospital served in its outdoor practice was new to him. It covered a square mile or so, wedged in between the city's grandiose centre and the gracious gardens of Alvaston. Though most of its streets had not been built more than sixty or seventy years, this area had already degenerated into a slum. Its typical unit consisted of a row of six three- or four-roomed houses

facing the street and duplicated by a similar row built back to back with them: a method of construction economical of bricks, mortar and ventilation, but prodigal of human life. The depth of each block of back-to-backs was pierced by a narrow passage, which looked—and often smelt—like a brick-lined sewer, leading into a courtyard, surrounded on the remaining three sides by similar blocks, in which ragged children played and women did their washing and gossiped and scolded. In the middle of this “court” stood two communal conveniences: a shed that served as a privy, with an ashpit behind it which the night-soil men cleared once a quarter, and a pump that drew water from a shallow well sunk in the sandstone and was the “court’s” only supply.

The slip which the night-porter handed him and his companion, a morose fourth-year student named Lowe, with whom he was “doing his cases,” directed them to Mrs. James Hollies, Back of Twenty-seven, Red Barn Road. There was no street-lamp within fifty yards of the house they sought, and they had to waste several minutes striking matches and trying to decipher the brass numerals nailed on to some of the doors. The passage through which they finally groped their way was pitch-black and splashy with puddles; the court itself seemed rather a sump for the collection of foul air than a means of venting it. Only one of the back-to-backs showed any sign of life: a faint glimmer of candlelight illumining a small upstairs window in

Which two broken panes had been replaced by squares of brown paper.

John knocked at the door and they entered the kitchen. It was a meagre box of a room, no more than ten feet square. There was no light inside but that of the gleed in the grate, over which its sole occupant, a man, crouched gloomily. The room had no furniture but a table and a couple of rickety chairs, on one of which he was sitting: a thin-chested young man—little more than a boy, John thought—with lank hair and a pallid face, which might have been freckled if the sun had ever touched it. He was a brass-worker by trade, as John guessed when he heard him coughing.

"Are you Mr. Hollies?" he asked. "We've come from the hospital."

"Ah," the husband assented huskily. "The Missus is upstairs and yo'll find the nurse there. It's been going on six hours, and I reckon it's time it was over. That old bizzom, her ought to have sent for you long afore this, and I told her so straight. But what can you do with a pack of women in the house? Gabble, gabble, gabble, the whole time, like a bleeding farm-yard. That's all they do."

John Bradley and Lowe felt their way up the stairs, which were narrower, if less noisome, than the brick passage. They emerged into a room even smaller and barer than the kitchen below. Three-quarters of its space was occupied by an iron double-bed, and the remaining quarter (or so much of it as could be seen)

crammed with female neighbours whom the light in the window of "Back of Twenty-seven" had drawn to the spot as a dying lamb attracts carrion-crows. There must have been six or seven of them—Lowe, enlarging the story afterwards, declared there were twelve—and all, as the bleached young husband below had complained, were gabbling—not, as it seemed about the patient's progress, but of what, in moments of heated debate, they and other people had said. The room itself was scrupulously clean, but the air, from which the brown-paper covering of the broken panes excluded all possible freshness, smelt mawkish with the imprisoned odours of their bodies and clothes and faintly of gin. Until he saw this bedraggled company John had no idea that a birth, in Red Barn Road, was a recognized public spectacle and a social occasion.

"Aren't there rather a lot of people up here?" he asked mildly.

"Oh, don't take no heed of us, doctor," one of the women said: she was a fat, big-bosomed creature with a battered face like a pugilist's and a wide, good-humoured smile. "Don't take no heed of us: we'm all married women. I've had seven myself and know all about it, so yo' needn't be shy."

The others broke into a cackle of laughter. Some were gross, like the pugilist; some were writhen and scranny; two, who wore their hair in plaits, looked no more than girls. John had no doubt in his mind that

they knew more "about it" than he did—which was not saying much—but it seemed to him it was time to exert his brief authority.

"Where is the nurse that sent the message?" he asked.

"Here she is, doctor. Here's Mrs. Hipkiss," the amiable bruiser said cheerfully, "and a better nurse you won't find, not in all North Bromwich. That's what *I* say."

She pointed to a small wizened creature in a grubby apron, with a flat snake-like forehead, small, lashless eyes, and a face like a marmoset's: a peaked, evil, abortionist's face, John thought, beneath wisps of grey hair, screwed up in a black tatted net.

"Well, get all these good ladies out of the room first, Mrs. Hipkiss," he said.

Without waiting to be dismissed, most of them moved downstairs reluctantly, leaving nobody in the room but the female pugilist, who stood her ground and appeared to be ready to fight rather than be ejected, the nurse, and the patient, whom John now saw for the first time. She lay on her left side at the edge of the bed, which sagged in the middle: a pale, pretty slip of a girl, almost ridiculously young, John thought, for motherhood. Her colouring resembled that of Laura Munslow; she had Laura's miraculously milk-white skin and refinement of feature. But her brow was lined, her beechen hair hung lank and darkened with sweat, and the hazel eyes that regarded

him fixedly, curiously, between narrowed lids, had a look of fear in them.

"Good evening, Mrs. Hollies," he said. (What else could he say?)

The young woman appeared not to hear his salutation. She continued to stare at him. Then she said suddenly:

"Are you going to help me, doctor? It's a'gone on so long!"

"Gone on long! I like that!" the fat woman cried. "D'you hear what her says, Mrs. Hipkiss? If you ask me, I'd say she was having a beautiful time. Why, when I was took bad with my first—and Mrs. Hipkiss remembers it well, don't you, Mrs. Hipkiss?—I was thirteen hour, and then 'ad to 'ave the instruments! And look at me now," she guffawed. "Ah, look at me now!"

John was watching the girl on the bed. She seemed to him a gentle, patient creature; but at the moment when the fat woman laughed he saw her eyes narrow to slits, her forehead wrinkle. She reached out her white arms, vaguely searching for something, and clutched at a ragged roller-towel tied to the rail at the foot of the bed. Her hands were small and well-shaped, though reddened by housework: there was a massive gold wedding-ring on one finger. She threw back her dank head and strained at the towel. John was aware of a transformation. The frail body was no longer limp and exhausted, but possessed, as it seemed,

By a gathering-together, a heaping-up of terrific energy that stiffened every muscle in the girl's quivering frame. The bed creaked; the iron rail bent; the pale face grew dusky-red as though the blood-vessels would burst. The fat woman smiled in triumph and nodded her head.

"That's right," she said. "That's a good 'un. That's the kind we want, don't us, Mrs. Hipkiss?"

The old woman, too, grinned and nodded: "Ah, that's the kind. That's a lovely pain, that is. Lovely. Just a few more like that. Hold on till it's finished, dearie. Don't let your breath slip. You bite on the piller, the same as I told yer."

The girl shuddered and relaxed. The hands which had clutched the towel let it go and lay limp. She gave a deep gasp as her head lolled over, and lay with closed eyes. Her suffused face grew ghastly white. But for her rapid, shallow breathing John would have thought she was dead. He felt himself oddly awed and shaken by the sight. None of the textbooks he had read had prepared him for anything like this.

There was a cautious tap on the door. The husband's wan face appeared. The girl opened her eyes. "Is that you, Jim?" she muttered quickly. "What d'you want? I'm all right."

"Yes, Jim, she's all right. She's just had a lovely one. A lovely one, 'aven't you, Dora?"

The patient gave a short laugh. John Bradley was surprised that she could laugh. "Well, if that's what

you call a lovely one, Lily," she said, "yo'm welcome to as many as you want of them, that's all I can say."

"Are you really all right, love?" the man whispered anxiously.

"Haven't I said I'm all right, silly? Oh, don't be soft, Jim. Go downstairs and get some sleep." She spoke to him as though she were humouring a tire-some child.

"It's only a message come from the hospital," he said. "They wants one of the doctors for another confinement in Grenville Street. Number six. Court thirteen. Name of Weaver. They've sent the bag."

"Look here, I'll go, Bradley," Lowe broke in, almost too eagerly.

"Very well. Go along then."

"Are you sure you'm all right, love?" the young man entreated again.

"Oh dear, what a fuss you men make! Go away, go away, Jim . . ."

The thin red hands fluttered once more in search of the knotted towel.

John Bradley remained alone with the three women. He crossed the room to the other side of the bed, to make sure for himself that conditions were really normal. Mrs. Hipkiss made way for him obsequiously. As she did so, John saw her hands and thought of Lacey. Her fingers were filthy and curved like the talons of a bird of prey. He remembered the figures of mortality from puerperal fever with which Lacey

Had staggered him. Twenty-five to thirty per cent in some hospitals: one in four, one in three; and he saw that foul old woman crawling from case to case with the blind spores of death on her fingers, bringing her own immemorial filth into this spotless house. He asked for water to wash his own hands in. There was none in the room. The fat woman, so inappropriately named Lily, went downstairs with reluctance and fetched him some tepid stuff in a bucket that had been used for peeling potatoes, and a fragment of soap. He examined the patient and satisfied himself, as well as he could in the candlelight, that the presentation was normal: an L.O.A., as they called it, the most favourable of all.

"Yes, that seems pretty good," he said. He supposed he had better say something encouraging.

"Now listen to that! Do you hear what the doctor says?" the fat woman bawled. "What did Mrs. Hipkiss tell you?"

"Ah, I heard what he said," the girl answered sardonically, "and I can hear what you say without your shouting like that and waking all the children next door." She laughed. "I reckon he'd think it pretty good if he had it himself. That's all I know."

John Bradley sat on the chair at the bedside, uncomfortably conscious of the fact that Mrs. Hipkiss had sat in it before him, and resigned himself to waiting. This was to be for him the first of many hundreds of such night-long vigils in the homes of the industrial

poor. He had been born of poor parents himself and brought up in a cottage; yet he couldn't help being shocked by the difference between rural poverty at its worst and the stark degradation of life in this back-to-back den, where even fresh air was an unobtainable luxury. When this baby was born—if ever it were born—what sort of life awaited it in this wilderness of grimy brick? If one valued one's peace of mind—as he must at this moment—such speculations were better evaded. Yet, as he sat there through the night, in a quietness made more drowsy by the women's whispered talk of negligible things, broken only, from time to time, by the bouts of coughing that racked the brass-worker's thin chest in the kitchen below, or by the creak of the bed and a sudden gasping for breath as wave after wave of pain, like those of a rising tide, seized the patient's body and stiffened it, his mind was full of strange speculations and questionings.

Sometimes, instead of the knotted towel she caught his hand, and he felt through the fierce contractions of hers the strength of the power that gripped her. She clutched his hand not because it was his, but as a drowning woman who feels great surges breaking over her might cling to the first floating object she touched. And though John returned her pressure, and sometimes bent over her, whispering lame words of encouragement, he knew that this sudden, haphazard relationship was as impersonal on his side as on hers: that this young and tender creature, the first glimpse

of whom had reminded him of Laura Munslow, was not to him an attractive young woman but a case, and that he, to her, was not a young man of human passions but a doctor. It struck him as strange and rather wonderful that in this intimacy imposed by pain, the great leveller, the conventions of civilized conduct were no longer important: that this girl, without any compunction, could abandon her natural modesty to a stranger, and that he, a shy, sensitive young man, should not be embarrassed by this abandonment. In the greater emergencies of birth and life and death, there was no need, it seemed, for the monitory edicts of the Hippocratic oath. If the fact were strange, it was, equally, providential.

So the night-long struggle wore on. The girl on the bed made no more sardonic jokes in the intervals between her torments. She was growing weaker; she no longer fought or struggled for herself but let the great waves of pain sweep over her and carry her body with them like a floating spar. She began to cry softly. Her cheeks were dabbled with tears. The fat woman's face, too, grew grim as she comforted her and stroked her dank hair.

"It can't be much longer now, lovey," she said. "We know what it is, Mrs. Hipkiss and me. But it won't go on much longer, will it, doctor? And the more you helps yourself the shorter it'll be."

"That's what you said four hours ago, Lily," the girl answered bitterly. "And I can't do no more. The

strength's all gone out of me. If I'd known, it was going to be like this I'd never have had one. And I'll never have another one, Lily: I tell you that straight."

Mrs. Hipkiss's toothless mouth grinned. "They all say that, dearie. But you'll forget all about it as soon as the babby comes, just like the rest."

"I won't, I won't! I'll never, never forget it so long as I live! Oh, doctor, doctor," she pleaded, "can't you help me?"

John Bradley shook his head. There was a bottle of chloroform in the hospital bag, but it could not be used without the house-surgeon's authority. He could do nothing to help her. What was more, during the last hour or so, he had been assailed by dreadful, insidious doubts that shook his confidence. For a long time now, it seemed to him, no progress had been made. He was tormented by thoughts of the disasters described in textbooks: impactions, contracted pelvises, ruptured uteruses—a whole series of horrors. He could not be sure of himself. He wished to God that he were not alone, that Lowe had not been called away. He was so doubtful of himself that if he had not realized that consulting them would have given his uncertainty away, he would gladly have asked that foul old woman Mrs. Hipkiss or even the woman called Lily for their opinion. For the first time he felt that the life of a human being—the lives of two human beings—depended on him. His book-learning counted for nothing. He knew himself to be ignorant

and impotent. If this poor girl died, her blood would be on his hands. He could see, as well, that the two women, who, from the moment of his arrival, had surrendered responsibility, were as doubtful as himself. Their ignorance, for all their experience, was even deeper than his. Though he assured himself, as he had often been told, that childbirth was a normal physiological process and that those who tampered with it bore a greater responsibility than those who left well alone—the Professor of Midwifery had proclaimed in his last lecture that the words: *Thou shalt do no Murder* should be stamped on every pair of forceps—he could not convince himself, for all the clinical evidence on which his reason insisted, that this prolonged torture was normal. The fear of approaching disaster overwhelmed him; and something of this must have shown itself in his face, for the two women's faces reflected it, and the fat woman said at last:

“Don't you think you ought to send Jim to the 'ospital, doctor, and fetch the surgeon, with her going on like this? I'm sure you've been most attentive—I can't say otherwise and neither can Mrs. Hipkiss—but the poor wench can't go on like this much longer, she can't. You've only to look at her. It won't take Jim ten minutes to run round.”

John could not answer them. His mind was divided between dislike of humiliation and dread of some unknown catastrophe. He wanted time to think it over and make up his mind. A few minutes could not make

much difference anyway. He rose from his chair and faced the window. The first paling of dawn, or the misty light of a late-rising moon, outlined a dismal row of chimney-pots. One half of his mind was convinced that his judgment was right; that all was well, and that the house-surgeon, if he were summoned, would think him a nervous fool. The other remembered Mrs. Hipkiss's doubtful face—Mrs. Hipkiss, who spent all her life and earned her living by her experience of such matters. He decided, at last, that the risk was too great. He would send a note to the house-surgeon and cover this humiliating confession of failure as best he could. He took a notebook out of his pocket and began to write on a torn-out page. A cry from the fat woman startled him:

“Quick, doctor . . . the baby's a'coming.”

He crumpled the paper rapidly and returned to the bedside. A miracle of unconscious energy was in progress. Within five minutes of a situation that had seemed utterly hopeless, the child was born.

“It's a boy—a beautiful boy,” the fat woman proclaimed in triumph, “and the image of Jim. What did the doctor tell you then, Dora?” she laughed, half hysterically. “Didn't he say from the first as everything was all right? *He* knew! I must run and tell Jim.”

An hour later, relieved and proud and oddly elated, John Bradley packed up his bag and put on his coat, preparing to leave the house. He bent over the girl

and felt her pulse to assure himself, for the last time, that all was well. It was feeble and rather fast, but regular. He had given her ergot and felt he could leave her safely.

"All right, Mrs. Hollies," he said, "I'll look round again during the day just to see how you are. But you'll be all right. Don't worry."

The thin hand closed on his with a minute acknowledging pressure. The girl opened her eyes and gazed at him wonderingly, rather as though she had never seen him before. There was no concentration of pain in them now; they were solemn, gentle, childlike; they compelled pity and kindness. She spoke feebly:

"Thank you, doctor," she said. "You did help me ever so."

(v)

Perhaps, after all, John Bradley reflected, she was right; perhaps the mere presence in that room of a person, however ill-qualified and doubtful in his own mind, the bearer of the hospital bag which symbolized for her the authority of Medicine, that fount of mysterious Wisdom, had given her the courage and confidence that the midwife, for all her experience, could not instil. This was another of "Dr." Mortimore's lessons in humanity which the study of science had made him forget. "Never you let 'em think," the old

man had often told him, "that you don't know as much about 'em—and maybe a little bit more—than God hisself." The new realization of this practical truth sent him on his way proudly. He had come through, it was true, by the skin of his teeth, but he had come through; and this sense of a personal triumph which had so nearly escaped him put him at peace with the world. In this exalted state of mind he could even feel kindly towards the abominable Mrs. Hipkiss, whose lashless, wicked eyes had, perhaps, just missed seeing through him, and find more than mere ugliness in Lily's battered face. For poor little Dora Hollies, he felt a tenderness more than ordinary. The thought of those solemn, childlike eyes affected him deeply, and the words she had whispered—"Thank you, doctor, you did help me ever so."—remained in his mind as the sweetest he had ever heard.

This high mood, however unjustified by his achievement, sustained him as he walked back to the hospital with his black bag. The summer day was breaking, cinnabar-red—in North Bromwich the density of the air, charged with carbon particles, endows dawn and sunset with unexpected splendours. In this welling of rosy light, which cast on the cobbled roadway elongated shadows of a diaphanous prussian-blue, the sooty Georgian façade of Easy Row and the four-square red-brick blocks of the Prince's Hospital with their free-stone porticoes were enriched, transfixed. He saw

beauty and spaciousness where he had never seen them before. The air of the empty street had an enchanting lightness, and his head was light, too, with relief from anxiety and want of sleep. He found Lowe, whose "case" had evidently been easier than his own, asleep on the sofa in the Residents' Room. He himself was in no mood for sleep, and it was too late in any case. He decided to dump his bag at the hospital, to go down to the "Cock and Magpie" for breakfast and collect some note-books which he had left behind on his work-table.

By the time John Bradley reached the centre of the city the builders and housebreakers were beginning to trudge in with their tools and their pannikins of cold tea. They had already been set to complete the demolition of the broken house next door to the inn whose blank party-wall still dominated his back bedroom window. Though it was barely half-past six, he had expected the street door of the "Cock and Magpie" to be open; for George Munslow, in spite of his beer-sodden nights, had not lost his countrymen's habit of early rising, and usually lumbered downstairs to kindle a fire and make tea as soon as it was light. John looked forward to seeing George Munslow and to boasting a little of his achievements during the night. It surprised him to find the door closed and the curtains still drawn; but that did not deter him, for he had a key of his own.

As he entered the bar, he was aware of an unusual

sound: a deep guttural snoring that shook the air of the room. He could not make out where it came from or guess what it might be. The little bar parlour was dim at the best of times, for no direct sunlight penetrated the narrow alley, and at this early hour only dim shapes of tables and chairs, and a faint reflected glimmer from the polished brass of the beer-engine handles and the rows of bottles behind them, were visible. As he moved towards the window, to let in the daylight, the sound seemed to grow nearer. His foot met an object soft and inert, like a sack of malt, which tripped him and threw him forward on to his knees. He picked himself up and pulled back the curtains hurriedly. The mass over which he had tripped was the prostrate body of a man: George Munslow sprawled there on his side, his great thighs drawn up and one massive red-haired forearm outstretched as though his hand had been clutching at the sill at the moment when he had fallen, facing the window. He lay there, his vast body shaken by the stertorous vibrations of his breath—dead-drunk, as John thought, till, kneeling beside him and lifting the inanimate head, he saw that one of his eyes was closed, the other open, and that while one side of the ruddy, good-humoured face twitched violently with each inspiration, the other sagged limp and unmoved, an expressionless mask. John's fingers slipped to the pulse of the outstretched arm and felt it. It was regular, but feeble and preternaturally slow. As he let it go the arm fell to the

floor with a thud. The one bloodshot eye appeared to regard him with blank surprise; the effect of the two, one closed and one open, was that of a sardonic wink. He knew what had happened now. George Munslow was not drunk. He had fallen to the floor with an apoplectic stroke.

John left him still snoring heavily and hurried upstairs to Mrs. Munslow's door. Her sharp, querulous voice answered his knock: "Yes, yes? What is it?"

"Please come downstairs quickly," he said. "Mr. Munslow has had an accident."

"An accident? What kind of accident?" she answered irritably. "What is it?" she repeated. "And what are *you* doing here, Johnny? He's that careless and clumsy. Has he cut himself, opening a bottle?"

"I'm afraid it's something worse than that, Mrs. Munslow?"

"Something worse?" Mrs. Munslow's voice had lost its querulousness. There was fear and determination in it now. "I'll come down at once," she said.

John returned to the bar. George Munslow was still shaking the air with his snores, and still one eye stared in surprise while the other winked. John asked himself what he should do, but found no answer. If the case had been "Dr." Mortimore's he would have bled him or cupped him or clapped leeches on to his neck. He could only stand gazing ruefully, helplessly, at this vast hulk with its one-eyed stare, and thinking how strange and how awful a thing it was that the

breaking of one small blood-vessel among hundreds of others in that fuddled, kindly brain could reduce this robust, ruddy man at one blow to impotence. From his scanty experience and what he had been taught he doubted if George would "come round" again. That terrible, rhythmical stertor suggested a pressure that could not be easily relieved. He had noticed, too, at once, that the stroke was left-sided: which meant that, even if poor George Munslow got over it, he would have lost his speech. He knew that he was never likely to hear that friendly Shropshire burr again. Perhaps, after all, it would be better, he thought, if George didn't come round. A man who had enjoyed a life of such gross and zestful heartiness would be a pathetic spectacle lying dumb and paralysed waiting for another blow until it came and he died. And here, once more it was the bulk of the stricken figure that shocked him: the thought of the sixteen-odd stone of muscle and bone and fat given over to immobility, and, at last, to corruption. In a man of such monstrous flesh the thought of mortality, with its material implications, seemed somehow more terrible than in that of "Dr." Mortimore or even in that of his father. It was strange to think how, within the short space between sunset and dawn, he had been called on to witness and take an intimate part in the two ultimate and contrasting solemnities of the human drama, in the mysterious beginning of life and the end of it—in Birth and in Death.

"Mrs. Munslow came swiftly downstairs and stood at his side. She was fully dressed in her usual black—she had even put on a clean apron—and her face, though pinched and grim, betrayed no emotion. Her fine eyes regarded her husband's prostrate hulk with a bemused dispassionateness.

"I'm afraid he's had a seizure," John said, "a stroke."

She did not answer. He went on—he felt that he must say something: the silence was intolerable—"A left-sided cerebral hæmorrhage." She emerged from her deep abstraction.

"What was that you said?"

"A stroke."

"Yes, yes, a stroke. My father went like that."

"I'd better go for a doctor."

"He's never had a doctor in his life. We don't have a doctor."

"There's one about two streets away. I remember the red lamp. I don't know his name."

"His name doesn't matter. Fetch him."

He heard a faint rustle and turned. Laura was coming downstairs. Her slim figure was closely wrapped in a pale flannel dressing-gown, and her hair, which hung in two plaits on either side of her pale, scared face, made her look like a schoolgirl. Mrs. Munslow, too, turned and saw her.

"Go back to your bedroom at once," she said harshly.

"But mother . . . what is it?"

"Don't you hear what I say? Go back to your bedroom and do as you're told this instant!"

She gave one piteous questioning glance at John Bradley and went. He was deeply moved by her frailty, her bewilderment, her submissiveness.

"You had better go for that doctor at once, John," Mrs. Munslow said coldly.

He was only too thankful to go. Her icy composure seemed almost more terrible to him than the sight of poor George Munslow; for George's catastrophe was a natural thing, while this woman's attitude was outside nature. It gave him "the shivers." He hardly knew whether to dread it or to admire it.

(vi)

George Munslow lived forty-eight hours after the workmen who were demolishing the house next door had carried him upstairs. He did not recover consciousness; but Mrs. Munslow sat by his side and kept watch over him until he died. During the five days that elapsed between the stroke and the funeral, John abandoned his work at the hospital. He had been accepted as a member of the family for nearly five years, and he felt it was the least he could do to stand by the two women. Though her husband lay dying—and, later, dead—upstairs, Mrs. Munslow refused to close the house to its regular customers. Business was

business, and she could not afford to lose money, she said. John served in the bar and received their friends' condolences. He was touched, but hardly surprised, to see how universally George had been liked and his wife respected.

Business was even brisker than usual, for, as many of the customers declared, there would never be no more beer so good as what poor George brewed, and they might as well make the most of it before the last barrels "went off."

During this time he naturally saw a great deal of Laura. She helped him with his work in the bar, washing tankards and mugs and glasses, and serving drinks. Their relationship was a strange one. For the first time in their lives they were left together immune from the censorship of Mrs. Munslow's watchful eyes. Yet, if this inhibition was removed, another took its place: their mute but ever-present consciousness of the tragedy which was drawing to its inevitable close in the silent bedroom upstairs. John himself was subdued by it, and Laura, it seemed, was no longer the little listless girl he had known, nor even the terrified, wide-eyed child whom her mother had packed upstairs. There must have lain unsuspected beneath her placidity something of Mrs. Munslow's inflexible stoicism; John had never perceived a hint of this undeclared heredity in her face, her movements or the tones of her voice—it was almost as though acute mental distress possessed the power of obliterating or

of removing those individual surface characteristics which one accepts as personality, and of disclosing the deeper and more essential family-likeness—just as the mechanism of the telephone reveals a family voice. Whatever else the catastrophe might have done, it had certainly made a woman of her—a woman more formed and mature in some ways, he told himself, than her physical double, poor little Dora Hollies, now peacefully suckling her first-born at the back of Twenty-seven, Red Barn Road. John Bradley often thought of her and her baby, lying there at the mercy of that foul harridan Mrs. Hipkiss, and wondered, with a sort of proprietary tenderness, how she was getting on.

He was losing a good deal of time which, in the struggle to pass his “final,” he could ill spare. It was no good worrying about that. His obligations to the Munsloes compelled him to see this grim business through; so he resigned himself to it, only returning to his work when the bar was closed at night and the little back bedroom undisturbed by the crashing and hammering of the demolition gang.

So four days passed. On the fifth he saw George Munslow's vast coffin steered down the narrow stairs. He drove, in the only carriage that followed it, through the wilderness of brick that stretched north-westward to the new cemetery at Winsworth Green. Mrs. Munslow and Laura sat side by side facing him, the mother heavily veiled in crape, the daughter's un-

veiled face dead-white and expressionless. There was no sound in the musty four-wheeler but the plodding of the black horses' hoofs and the grating of iron tyres on the cobbles. The space between the two seats was so short and John's legs were so long that he felt them to be indecently in the way. Laura was nursing a bundle of flowers that had been thrust into her hand at the last moment by one of George's Shropshire customers, a cattle-dealer from Diddlebury, who had turned up that morning for a quart at the "Cock and Magpie," not knowing that his friend was dead: "Throw them in on the top of him, like, Miss Munslow," he had said. "Your dad would have gloried in the notion if he'd a'been living: a great 'un for flowers was old George, though these be common ones, hardly fit for a funeral, as you might say." It was a big mixed posy plucked from a cottage-garden, of pink overblown roses, sweet-williams, and phloxes, whose heavy scent—one of the scents of his Lesswardine childhood—mingled rather unpleasantly with the four-wheeler's smell of rank straw.

But it was of Mrs. Munslow rather than of Laura, nursing her bundle of flowers and gazing above them vacantly, that John Bradley was thinking. If her soul had always seemed to him as inscrutable as her face, it was even more secret now. Was it fitting, he asked himself, for a widow to follow her husband to the grave dry-eyed? Was the rigid composure, the brutal matter-of-factness which she had displayed from the

first moment of the calamity, assumed as a protective covering for emotions too sacred to be shown? Was this tearless face a mask? Had she loved her husband, or had she come to think of him as a cumbrous nuisance? Was it even possible that she was glad to be rid of him?

His questions were never to be answered. Neither when she stood by the grave nor while the black horses trotted home to the "Cock and Magpie" with a livelier rhythm in their hoof-beats, did Mrs. Munslow's set features relax. As soon as they were home she took off her weeds and put on her starched apron as usual. They took their tea, which Laura prepared, in a crushing silence. It was only when Laura had taken the tea-things away to wash in the scullery that Mrs. Munslow spoke.

"You have been very good to us, Johnny," she said, with an obvious effort. "I'm very grateful, and I'm sure George would be grateful too and would wish me to thank you, if he knew."

"I did nothing . . . nothing," John said. "You've both of you been so kind to me. It's I who ought to be grateful."

"Yes, yes," she continued impatiently, as though his gratitude bored her, "but you did a great deal. My husband was very fond of you. If he took a fancy to anyone they could do no wrong. But that is all over. I want to speak of the future. George was not a provident man. Some people admired him for it, and that

did him no good. I have always tried to keep our money affairs straight myself—he had no head for figures—and I’m afraid there will be very little left now he’s gone. We shall have to work for our living. Well, that doesn’t matter. I’m used to it, and Laura will learn. I don’t suppose George ever told you that the lease of this house falls in at Michaelmas, in a few months’ time?”

“Mr. Munslow never mentioned it.”

“No, he wouldn’t. He had what they call a ‘happy nature.’ If things worried him, he simply pretended they didn’t exist. He left *me* to do all the worrying. Well, as soon as the lease falls in, the Council will take over this house and knock it down. The whole lane will go. George knew what was going to happen perfectly well, but he refused to make any plans. He was that kind of man. So, a few weeks ago, most fortunately as it turns out, I wrote on my own account to Astills the brewers. I never dared let George know: he was so proud of brewing his own beer, so perhaps it was a good thing he didn’t. Astills were very obliging. Sir Joseph knew my father, and the ‘Cock and Magpie’ has always had a good name, I’m glad to say. They have nothing available in North Bromwich, but they’ve offered me one of their houses in Wednesford, a very superior house, and when everything’s settled up,”—she sighed heavily—“I think I shall just about manage to meet the in-goings.”

"That means that I shan't be able to stay here any longer?" John Bradley asked.

"Yes, that's what it means," Mrs. Munslow said. "Of course, wherever we go there will be a home for you. George would have wished me to tell you that; and I shall always respect his wishes."

(VII)

During the next few weeks the Munsloes were packing up their belongings and needed John's help in every moment he could spare. Already the picks and crowbars of the housebreakers were busy demolishing poor George's brewhouse. This confusion was not the best of preparations for his final examination in Clinical Surgery, Medicine and Midwifery: the most important event in all his twenty-three years. What he remembered most clearly in these momentous days was his acute disappointment when he arrived at Euston and found that Lacey was not waiting for him on the platform: after that, the drive through the wet Bloomsbury streets to Lacey's lodgings, and an even more crushing dismay when the landlady told him that Mr. Lacey had left London "for abroad" a few days earlier. When John asked her if she could allow him to stay in his friend's rooms for a night or two, she had been even more discouraging: Mr. Lacey, she said, had left no instructions about that, and it wasn't

for her to take the responsibility of letting him in. She didn't even know whether Lacey had received a letter from him before he left. If he hadn't, in all probability it was still on the mantelpiece awaiting his return.

Defeated and put to flight, John Bradley delivered himself into the hands of the cabby, who finally deposited him and his luggage in some unsavoury lodgings of his choice at the back of Bow Street, where he spent an abominable night in more company than he had bargained for. He could smell that frowsty bedroom still, and remember the sounds that penetrated the party-walls from its neighbours on either side. It was not what Mrs. Munslow would have called "a superior house."

During the next three days, with a muzzy head, he sat for his examination at the Apothecaries Hall. In his written papers, he considered he had done fairly well; but in the Medical *viva-voce*, conducted by a small, venomous physician who appeared to dislike him at first sight—possibly because of his contrast in size—he lost his head and floundered; and his anxiety to make good after this disaster made him recklessly ingenious and unorthodox on the subject of "J'int's" before a surgical examiner who had no acquaintance with "Dr." Mortimore's methods and who went up in smoke when later, in a misguided moment, he mentioned antiseptics. John waited in London until the results were posted, and was not surprised when he found he had failed in both subjects.

It was a sorry blow to his pride. The truth of the matter was, as he told himself ruefully on the homeward journey, that his earlier successes had been founded on Lacey's coaching. He had been carried over the first two obstacles, as it were, on Lacey's shoulders, and gained a false confidence which had been his undoing. In this mood of defeat the situation seemed to him desperate. Even at his modest rate of living, those five years in North Bromwich had eaten into his capital: the urban standard of life had demanded all sorts of casual expenditures which he hadn't foreseen. He remembered what Mr. Laxton had said about "flying high" when first he had announced his intention of becoming a doctor. Comparing himself with other men of humble origin whose achievements were commended in *Self Help*, he realized that he had taken things far too easily. He ought perhaps, to have followed the example of the younger Hunter, who had never, in his youth, allowed himself more than four hours' sleep in a day, and had devoted the remaining twenty to self-improvement.

There was another respect in which this prodigy's example might well have helped and warned him. "My rule," John Hunter had declared, according to Mr. Smiles, "is deliberately to consider, before I commence, whether the thing I am aiming at is practicable. If it be not practicable, I do not attempt it." Did that confession, perhaps, suggest the secret of his own failure? Had he over-estimated his powers? In the

shock of this set-back his mind swung back in the opposite direction: he wondered, timidly, if he were destined to become one of those pathetic figures called "chronics"—middle-aged men who haunted medical schools for ten years on end and yet, somehow, never managed to become qualified.

Such a melancholy fate, indeed, seemed improbable in his case—if only for the reason that his funds wouldn't run to another five years of study. He was faced, moreover, by the urgent problem of where he was going to live now that the Munsloes had moved to Wednesford. He had made so sure of passing his "final" that he had promised himself to take on a resident hospital appointment as Cartwright's house-surgeon immediately after his return. It was the bitterest of the physic he had to swallow to have to confess to Cartwright that he had failed.

He found his old chief still arrayed in his blood-stiffened "operating coat" in the theatre at Prince's. Cartwright greeted him gaily:

"Well, Bradley, my boy, what's the news?"

"Bad news, sir. I've failed in the *vivas*."

"The devil you have! Well, that's awkward for both of us, ain't it? Wait till I get off this coat, and then we'll have a talk."

He took John's arm and they sauntered down the corridor. John Bradley had never liked this stocky, grizzled man, with his shrewd, kindly eyes and his gruff speech, so well as he did that morning.

"You know your work well enough, Bradley," he said. "If I hadn't recognized that I shouldn't have offered to take you on. What does passing a *viva* mean, anyway? Nothing more than that a fellow has got the gift of the gab. Good surgeons are craftsmen, not talkers. What's more, these beggars in London take a delight at having a smack at boys who come up from provincial schools. That's their way of getting their own back. The fellow who turned you down is by way of fancying himself as a gynæcologist; and it sticks in their gizzards that women from all over the world are giving them the go-by and flocking to North Bromwich to see Simpson-Lyle, who's a bigger surgeon than the lot of them rolled together. You'll get through all right next shot, Bradley. There's nothing to worry about. The only point is: what are you going to do with yourself in the meantime?"

John told him how he had been hit by the Munsloes' departure.

"Yes, that is bad luck," Cartwright said. "A Shropshire man, was he? And he brewed his own beer? I wish I'd tasted it. By the time our benefactor Joe Astill's bought up every pub in the district, there won't be a quart of honest home-brew left in North Bromwich. The next generation won't even know what it tastes like. But there you are, my boy: this is a chemical age, worse luck to it! They'll be mixing their damned carbolic acid with malt and quassia before they've finished. But that's by the way. What you ought to

do, as I see it, is to get a job as an unqualified assistant, earning your keep and a few shillings beside before you go up to the Hall again. That ought not to be difficult. I'll write out a recommendation, and if I hear of anything suitable, as I may do, I'll let you know. Now come round the wards with me. We've struck a bad patch lately. I've two cases of hospital-gangrene in here. I should like to turn them over to Borden and see what he can do with his antiseptic tricks."

He laughed, thrust his hands beneath his coat-tails, and strutted into the ward. The "good old surgical stink" was in evidence. He inhaled it enthusiastically.

A few days later he called John aside again.

"Look here, Bradley. I've heard of a job for you. Assistant to Jacob Medhurst. Ever heard of him? A sound man, with a rattling good practice. Corner of Boulton Crescent. You know where that is? A stone's-throw from the Infirmary, on the edge of the jewellers' quarter. Jacob Medhurst's a bit of a character: a great friend of Simpson-Lyle's. I've spoken to him about you. Go and see him this afternoon, about five o'clock."

CHAPTER FIVE

(I)

It was one of the most mysterious things about life, Dr. Bradley thought, reviewing the events of that afternoon long ago when Cartwright had sent him to see Jacob Medhurst in Boulton Crescent, that a man can approach its climatic moments without any premonition of their significance. He had certainly not been deeply conscious of anything that day but a natural relief at the prospect of his most pressing economic problems being solved—or, at any rate, shelved.

Boulton Crescent lay on the opposite side of the town from the Prince's. It took its name from that great citizen of North Bromwich, Matthew Boulton, who, a century earlier, in partnership with James Watt, had perfected the mechanism of the steam engine in a small factory whose position had been chosen on the strength of deposits of casting-sand and a small brook that provided water-power at the bottom of the hill below the Great Western Station. The works of Boulton and Watt had long since been transferred to an ampler site on the city's outskirts, and the space they once occupied was now oversprawled by a long street

Of shabby shops of a vinegarish nature, which sold cowheels and wheelks and winkles and pickled onions, and an area of working-class houses as mean as those in the Red Barn Road, yet even more dismal—seeing that the trough of the stream which had given the engineers their water-power acted now as a sump or drain for the smoke with which the forest of neighbouring chimneys saddened the sky.

Dr. Jacob Medhurst's house, together with the adjoining North Bromwich Infirmary, stood high on the farther slope overlooking this Tartarean valley. It was a tall, early-Victorian building of smoke-grimed brick, with some pretensions to shabby dignity. Iron railings enclosed a small courtyard in front of it, and a flight of stone steps led through this to a front-door surmounted by a red lamp and a fanlight on which the owner's name was painted in large gilt letters. Though it had none of the gracious sedateness of the Laceys' house in Alvaston, John found it, compared with the "Cock and Magpie," impressive. Dr. Jacob Medhurst was evidently a man of substance.

He mounted the stone steps with deference and rang the bell. On either side of the door were lace-curtained windows. As he stood there, waiting, John Bradley had the impression that somebody, behind those curtains, was watching him. From inside the house he heard music: the tinkle of a piano, as it seemed to him brilliantly played, which stopped suddenly, giving place to the sound of women's voices and a ripple of

light laughter which he connected, in a manner not flattering to himself, with the invisible onlooker. At last the front-door was opened cautiously and an undersized, slatternly maid wearing a cap with streamers regarded him doubtfully. Neither the piano nor the laughing voices were audible now. The silence was curious and expectant.

"You've come to the wrong door," the little maid told him firmly. "The surgery entrance is round the corner, please; and, what's more, it's no use your going there either. The surgery don't open till six."

"Dr. Medhurst's expecting me," John told her.

The maid shook her head incredulously. She stood her ground, determined not to admit him. "You'd better look round at the surgery at six," she said. John protested:

"Mr. Cartwright, of the Prince's Hospital, made the appointment for five o'clock."

"I know nothing about that, but you can't see the doctor now. He's asleep. He always sleeps after dinner," she said, "and I dursn't waken him."

"Then I'd better wait till he wakes."

"I don't know about that, I'm sure," the maid said dubiously. "The waiting-room doesn't open, not before six. If you care to look round again in about an hour's time . . ."

She was so determined that there seemed nothing left for him but an ignominious retreat. At his first

sign of hesitation, she hastened to close the door on him with such obvious relief that John Bradley couldn't help laughing to himself. He had already turned to go when another voice reached him.

"Please don't go," it said. "Lizzie . . . let the gentleman in."

The maid re-opened the door reluctantly. Behind her, John Bradley saw the owner of the voice—and perhaps, he thought, of the laugh that had disquieted him. She was a tall, dark young woman, possibly a little older than himself, very plainly and neatly dressed, according to the fashion of the day, in a many-buttoned bodice, high at the neck, and an ample skirt supported behind by a bustle whose protuberance, combined with that of sleeves puffed at the shoulder, made her waist appear even slimmer than it was. Round her neck she wore a thin gold chain from which hung a locket filled with a plait of grey hair, and this locket she fingered with hands that issued from frilled cuffs and seemed to John Bradley, accustomed to the hands of Laura and Mrs. Munslow and the nurses at Prince's, of a surprising whiteness and delicacy. Her face, in contrast to these, was fresh-complexioned—however tightly she was "laced," no signs of anæmia there! The healthy skin had a faint lavender bloom. Long-lashed eyes, smoky-blue like gun-metal, smouldered rather than shone beneath brows too straight for beauty and almost as black as his own. Her mouth too was over-straight, and, though it

appeared good-humoured, the line of the lips was determined and capable also of petulance, of scorn or even of cruelty. When he saw those lips John Bradley felt sure he knew who had laughed at him from behind the lace curtain.

"Please come in," she said not very invitingly. "You're the new assistant, aren't you?"

"I'm hoping I may be," John said.

"Oh, I'm sure you will." She spoke as though it were a matter of no importance to her in any case. "My uncle's in there. He may be asleep, but you'd better go in, just the same."

She opened the first door on the left of the passage: the brass rings of a chenille portière slid back with a metallic whisper. John found himself in a room magnificently equipped with gilt Empire furniture. As he entered it, a gilt clock under a tall dome of glass on a console table supported by a sphinx with an ormolu breastplate, broke out into a hurried, irritable little chime and struck five. At the same moment, he became aware of the room's only occupant, a corpulent man with big brown beard parted in the middle, who reclined, with his feet propped up, on a massive gilt chair, the upper part of his face concealed by a spread of white handkerchief. The striking of the clock, or, perhaps, John's entrance, awakened him. A podgy hand, heavily ringed, pulled the handkerchief away, unveiling a shining expanse of bald scalp, strong pugnacious features, and a pair of fierce little eyes that

blinked at him, without any sign of pleasure, from beneath bushy eyebrows.

"What the devil," the stout man said, "are *you* doing here, sir?"

"Mr. Cartwright told me to call, sir."

"Oh, you're Cartwright's young man, are you? And who the devil told you to come in here?"

"A young lady showed me in, sir."

"The devil she did! A young lady. H'm. Dark or fair?"

"She was dark, sir."

"I might have known it. That wench is a parcel of mischief. What time is it?"

"Five o'clock, sir."

"Five o'clock? My God, you don't say so! I must have dropped off for a moment. So you're Cartwright's young man? Come along. We'd better have tea."

He raised himself, puffing and cumbrous, from the great gilt armchair. When he stood, John was astonished to see that the leonine head, the massive torso and the prominent paunch were supported by unusually short legs and tiny feet, presenting a figure that resembled one of Leslie Ward's caricatures in *Vanity Fair*. It was of about the same height as Cartwright's, in a grosser, sensualized version which lacked the hard compactness of that grizzled tough little man; and the resemblance was emphasized by the fact that he wore a short-tailed frock-coat with grease-spotted silk

revers, like Cartwright's operating-coat, though the plump hands which protruded from starched cuffs, frayed at the edge, were as different from the surgeon's as could well be imagined.

As he came to himself, Dr. Medhurst's face, which until now had seemed anything but inviting, grew good-humoured in a blurred Falstaffian fashion; but the good humour, John Bradley noticed, did not extend to his small eyes, which were yellowish and suffused, like those of a cigar-smoker, and remained shrewd and hard.

"Come along, come along, my boy," he roared in a voice surprisingly resonant for a man of his stature. "Come along. We've neither of us eaten anything since dinner. Isn't that so? Ha-ha-ha! Come along!"

Still puffing and wheezing he led John across the passage and opened the door of the room from which the young woman had emerged. It was of the same size as the Empire drawing-room, but seemed smaller and cosier. In one corner stood a piano, laden with music: in front of the curtained window two young women sat sewing on a couple of easy chairs of Victorian mahogany upholstered in dark red plush; but the whole of the centre of the room was occupied by an enormous dining-table covered with a damask cloth and loaded with such an abundance of food, rich cakes and buttered scones and toasted pikelets, as to suggest a school-treat. His little eyes gloated greedily over

the spread as he strutted to the side of the fireplace and rang the bell.

"Well, well," he said, "Janet, Clara, this is Mr. . . ." He looked at John, hesitating.

"My name's Bradley, sir. John Bradley."

"Mr. Bradley, of course. I've no memory for names, and anyone who can read Cartwright's writing deserves a prize. You've met my niece Janet already. She played a nice trick on both of us, the mischievous hussy; but I forgive her because if I didn't I know she'd make her poor uncle's life a misery and because of her eyelashes. And this other bundle of mischief is her sister Clara."

The second young woman acknowledged John's bow demurely. She was dressed, like her sister, in the grotesque mode of the day, which seemed, in her case, more exaggerated. For she was not so tall and had not the same flashing distinction of colouring and form and feature. Yet from that first, unforgettable moment when he set eyes on her, John Bradley knew which of the two he preferred. Though she was smaller and less striking than Janet, there was no lack of fire in her. It seemed rather as if its glow were softer and kindlier, more evenly sustained and less subject to the lurid effulgence with which, on occasion, Janet's dark beauty flared out and took one's breath away. If there were less heat, perhaps there was more light in this unsmouldering flame, which gave it an effect of pure clarity that, by association of ideas, matched her name.

John Bradley had always been liable to an instinctive repulsion—even when momentarily attracted—from women who were dark, like himself. Laura Munslow's beechen hair and milky whiteness of skin had been capable of moving him. But his proper physical affinity, as he had been reminded with no uncertainty in his recent encounters with women, lay somewhere between these extremes. When he found himself looking twice at a woman, he usually discovered later that she was neither definitely dark nor fair, and a similar inclination towards the indeterminate in colouring revealed itself in his preference for women who showed no extremes of temperament. Brilliant women intimidated him; shy women—if that were possible—increased his own shyness. But Clara Medhurst was neither tall nor short, neither fair nor dark, neither brilliant nor shy. Her features were less pronounced than her sister's but more regular. Though her mouth resembled Janet's in its straightness of line and her lips were equally determined, there was in them no hint of scornful petulance, no suggestion of possible cruelty; and if her eyes (they were green, he decided) had not the fulgurous magnificence of Janet's, being much gentler, they were no less lively: there was humour in them, though humour of a kindlier cast, and shrewdness too; but the quality which struck John most of all was their candour, the candour of an unselfconscious innocence: it would not merely be difficult but criminal, he felt, to deceive such eyes as those. Her

hair, which was dressed like her sister's in the mode which distinguished George du Maurier's young ladies, was finer in texture and of a middle brown that had lights of wintry gold in it, and the same mild inner radiance (which reminded him instantly of the tempered golden light that suffused the Laceys' library) enriched a complexion which, but for it, might have seemed pallid, making it living and warm and subject to swift changes of colour. One of these, as his gaze lingered on her face rather longer than was polite, now transformed its creamy delicacy with a quick rising colour that spread upwards like the flush on a rose-petal, denoting a faint embarrassment which compelled her to avert her eyes and reducing John Bradley to an even more painful confusion made him blush hotly in return. And he blushed the more because he felt Janet's lovelier (but less sympathetic) eyes were on them both, and that her lips, if she smiled were it ever so faintly, would be scornful. In that moment he felt that he hated Janet Medhurst, and knew, with an equal certainty, that he was in love with her sister. Like his mother, he had the faculty, it would seem, of quick decision in matters of that kind.

(II)

Was it usual in human experience, Dr. Bradley asked himself, as he sat with closed eyes vaguely con-

scious of the fireside warmth and of the lashing of yet another autumnal shower on the window-panes, was it usual or even common for a man to remember as he did the precise aspect of a woman's face at the moment when he fell in love with her? In the matter of transient loves, and even in that of brief, unromantic encounters, he supposed such experiences were actually no more rare: he had been able this evening, for instance, to recall an impression of the kind called "photographic" of the heroine (the word would pass) of his first midwifery case, the young woman named Dora Hollies, whom he had watched for six hours one night more than fifty years ago and never set eyes on again. When one had loved a woman rapturously, and wooed her and married her, and lived at her side for years seeing her face day by day—in health and sickness, in joy and distress, in pain and, maybe, in anger—one came to take her mere physical features for granted, regarding them as the less important part of what had become a presence, an influence, an inseparable constituent of one's personal existence—as was proved by the fact that one hardly noticed changes in them. So it was that, as he now considered it, he realized that this first image of Clara Medhurst, perceived and fixed in the moment when they stood blushing at one another that afternoon in her uncle's dining-room, remained clearer with him and even more real than any of the photographs, still treasured and now packed away in his luggage upstairs, which had been

"taken" of her later, when she was his wife. It was perhaps providential that this was the image which remained, clear-cut and as inalterably immune from Time's ravages as that of a crystal intaglio or of a Grecian coin. He might, if he would, recall aspects of greater loveliness, and one of desolation; yet nothing remembered in life (or even in death) could mar the pure perfection of the shape incised on his mind in that moment of exaltation when he told himself, unbelievably, that he loved her—a brief moment, broken by her sister asking him, with a voice in which he thought he detected a disturbing mockery, if he wouldn't please sit down.

Dr. Jacob Medhurst was less observant or susceptible, it seemed, to such shades of atmosphere, particularly in the presence of food. He attacked his tea with an animal gusto which was sufficient to explain the dimensions of his figure. While he ate, washing down the food with gargantuan draughts of tea out of one of the basin-like cups called jeroboams, he directed a quick-fire of questions on John Bradley, whom Janet had placed next to Clara at his right hand. His questions were remarkably shrewd. There was no sign of fatty degeneration about Jacob Medhurst's brain when it got to work, and by the end of the meal, when he ceremoniously removed the napkin he had tucked into his collar, wiped his beard with it and lit a cigar, there was very little of John's recent history with which the company were not fully acquainted—rather more,

in fact, than pleased him: for his answers necessarily revealed a number of things, such as his association with "Dr." Mortimore and the Munsloes and his recent failure at the Apothecaries Hall, which he would rather have admitted in private than in the presence of the two young women to whom he was anxious to appear in a more flattering light. When the doctor had finished questioning him, he felt that he had been forced to display himself to them as a rustic oaf and a frequenter of low company, as stupid in mind as he was uncouth in person. Such, at least, seemed the commentary betrayed, and as quickly suppressed, by the hint of a contemptuous smile that flickered occasionally on Janet Medhurst's lips. Not that he cared a brass farthing what Janet thought about him—from the first he had accepted the fact that no love was ever likely to be lost between her and him—but he did most anxiously and fervently desire to shine in her sister's eyes, and the reactions of Clara, with whom her critical glances were exchanged, remained hidden from him and doubtful.

No such problematical doubts, it appeared, troubled Jacob Medhurst's mind. John's showing, poor as it seemed to himself, apparently satisfied him. The mere fact that he had been recommended by Cartwright spoke sufficiently loudly in his favour to counteract his own damning admissions. As to John's recent failure in London, the doctor was contemptuous. The Rome and the Mecca of Medicine, to his mind, was evidently

North Bromwich, and his friend, Simpson-Lyle, the prophet of his faith. All the London surgeons were jealous of Lyle; and small wonder, for Lyle could wipe the floor with the lot of them. It seemed too that, with him, John's questionable origins and his very uncouthness were points in his favour. He had neither use nor sympathy for the fashionable toadies in London, who set up as gentry and founders of families with an eye on a baronetcy, which Simpson-Lyle had commendably declined when Gladstone had pressed him to take one. A doctor was first a craftsman and then a tradesman, and those who pretended to be anything else were traitors to a calling that had enough nobility of its own without any nonsensical label to guarantee it. The plainer a doctor was, the better he liked him. He was a plain man himself.

He was by no means so plain as he made himself out to be, as John quickly realized when he began to work for him. Jacob Medhurst, in fact, in spite of his somewhat grotesque and revolting exterior, the reflection of a gross sensuality, was a creature endowed with remarkable shrewdness and subtlety. Though he looked an old man, he must actually have been in the early fifties, only a few years older than his famous friend and idol, Simpson-Lyle, whom physically he resembled. In less than twenty-five years of work in North Bromwich he had built up a practice that covered all classes of society, from industrial millionaires to small shop-keepers and wage-earners, and

accumulated a fortune. All was grist that came to the mill of his energy. There was nothing—not even the physical grossness which made him a familiar and unmistakable figure, that he was not prepared to exploit in his pursuit of financial gain and, what was even more dear to him, the intoxication of power which the spending of money gave him. He was a hard man, capable of astonishing generosity; a tyrant, prone to soft-hearted indulgences; a cynical realist, with a pronounced vein of sentimentality. In everything that he did, he took pride in being a little more than life-size—was it possible, Dr. Bradley thought, that the stature of these mid-Victorians was actually greater than that of the generation that succeeded them? If he worked (and made his assistants work) far harder and for longer hours than most of his colleagues, he took his pleasures with an equally dynamic zest. As John Bradley saw on his first day at Boulton Crescent, he was a gluttonous eater, with a particular relish for the grosser varieties of food and violent seasonings. Every Tuesday night, when “surgery” was over, he would sit down to gobble an enormous dish of tripe and onions or chitterlings or black puddings, which he soured with mustard-sauce or chili-vinegar; and on Saturdays, he and his boon-companion Simpson-Lyle always supped together on oysters, four dozen apiece, at a little shop incongruously and irreverently tucked away in the basement of a little Georgian church that stood on the corner of the Central Square, facing the Corinthian

Town Hall. A good deal of champagne accompanied this orgy—Simpson-Lyle was making his twenty thousand a year in those days—and when it was over these two fat men, in their long fur-collared overcoats, prolonged it by driving in Lyle's private safety-cab (which, after the Town Hall itself, was Mr. Joseph Aloysius Hansom's highest contribution to the culture of the age) to the green-room of the Queen's Theatre, where they diverted themselves with the young ladies of the stock-company. Considering that one of them was the most popular surgeon and the other the busiest general practitioner in North Bromwich and that both were middle-aged men, it was surprising that either of them had any energy left for such adventures; but both were proud of the "way" they had with women, and their capacity for burning of the candle at both ends was also a matter of personal pride and in the tradition of the robust, full-blooded life of which they considered themselves the last upholders.

In spite of these physical indulgences, Jacob Medhurst remained a conscientious and extremely skilful practitioner. There were elements of the "showman" in him (as in Simpson-Lyle), extravagant gestures and poses which reminded John frequently of "Dr." Mortimore. He practised by means of a native clinical instinct and less by knowledge than by the acute deductive powers which his small, shrewd, blood-shot eyes had developed by observation. He treated men and women rather than cases and sometimes cured

them, as he admitted (and boasted), by bluff. Like his boon-companion and Cartwright he did not believe in germs and was opposed to the new "antiseptic nonsense," an attitude which, as he knew his own limitations and did no surgery, mattered hardly at all; yet, if he were old-fashioned in this, in some other respects he was in advance of his time. He had, for instance, a most unusual lack of faith in the efficacy of drugs. The dispensary in which he compounded his medicines contained less than a dozen stock-mixtures, made up in Winchester quarts. He rarely wrote a prescription, and considered all pharmacological refinements a waste of time.

"When you've been at the game as long as I have," he sniffed, "you'll have learnt that there are only two or three specifics in medicine: Potassium Iodide and Mercury for Syphilis, salicylates for Rheumatism, and cinchona-bark for Malaria—which you'll probably never see. All the rest is a matter of common sense."

His precepts resolved themselves into a sort of Medical Decalogue.

(1) "If your patient is costive, purge him like hell; if it's the other way, bind him; if he's feverish, sweat him; if he's going to get well, make his wife think he's dangerously ill, for when he gets better she'll give you the credit; if he's going to die, and you've time, shove him into hospital and you won't get the blame.

(2) "Never follow a patient's funeral: it's the worst advertisement a doctor can have. But whether he's really ill or merely frightened, never let him leave this house without a bottle of physic that tastes and smells like the devil and has plenty of body.

(3) "Never let your patients think your physic's come out of the tap: they know that tap-water's cheap; but they don't know, thank God, that a little burnt sugar goes a long way and that bitters costs next to nothing.

(4) "Whatever you put in the bottle, wrap it up neatly—I'll teach you how to do that—with a nice, smooth fold down the back of the bottle and a well-written label.

(5) "You've ten stock mixtures to play with here, though in nine cases out of ten it wouldn't matter a damn if you chose one of them blindfold; so if a patient complains that the one you've given him does him no good, just give him another, or change the colour of it. You'll notice one Winchester quart at the end of the row labelled G.O.K. That stands for God Only Knows, and as God only does know what's wrong with most of us, you'll find it more useful than any of 'em. That mixture, my boy, has cured more chronic ailments than anything I ever invented. I don't know what it tastes like, and I hope I never shall; but it would take the roof off a crocodile's mouth and shift an elephant.

(6) "Most urgent cases, who call you out because

they are going to die in the middle of the night, and nearly all who think they are suffering from heart-disease, have a touch of the wind. Pickled onions and cold pork at midnight are the commonest cause of heart-disease, and that kind is curable with Sodium Bicarbonate and Rhubarb and Peppermint and a quarter of a grain of Calomel every two hours.

(7) "People who think they are going to die generally disappoint the relations they've raked out of bed, and the same applies to those who think they are going mad or swear they're about to commit suicide. As a general rule men do that to frighten themselves—or their wives.

(8) "Never hurry over a midwifery case. Just sit tight and look cheerful. At the last census a couple of years ago there were twenty-nine million nine hundred and seventy-four thousand people living in England and Wales. More than twenty-five million of these were born without inconvenience to anyone but their mothers. Remember that when you're scared, as you certainly will be; and if you drag me out in the night unnecessarily, you'll have something to be scared about!

(9) "Never leave a case, however trivial it may be, without putting a name to it. If your patient's wife or aunt can't pronounce the name, so much the better; it'll do him a world of good, and if you alter your diagnosis they won't know the difference.

(10) "Never look at a pretty woman more than you

can help. If she's ill, there's bound to be something unpleasant about her to fix your mind on. If you can't find one, avoid her like the plague—and send for me! I know all about women—and so does old Simpson-Lyle.”

(III)

He certainly knew a good deal—and so did Simpson-Lyle, as was proved, a few years later, by the scandal that broke him. Yet both these men, as Dr. Bradley looked back on them, had something large about them—unless it were the mist of time that magnified their stature. And both, though prejudiced and obstinate and even vindictive at times, were essentially kindly. Lyle's origins were wrapped in a mystery which he exploited as part of his theatrical make-up. Jacob Medhurst's were not mysterious. He made no bones about them and was, in fact, rather proud of them. He was the elder son of a prosperous farmer and butcher in Gloucestershire, and had been attracted to anatomy in his boyhood by the materials of his father's trade. He had served in the shop and the slaughter-house until his father died. Then, having sold the business well and handed over the farms to his younger brother, the father of the two girls who now kept his bachelor house for him, he had launched

himself into the study of medicine in North Bromwich and emerging from his five years' apprenticeship had bought out the man to whom he had been articled and started practice for himself in the house where he had been trained.

It was a good bargain. Of course he made a success of it. He was already well known to most of the patients, and the district, with its wide spread of fine mechanical activities, largely escaped the mid-century slump that hit the heavy industries and enjoyed a steady prosperity. Even at the time when John Bradley knew him he was a man of remarkable force: as a young, ambitious man his output of energy must have been titanic. He was a man of the people himself, and the people understood him. He pursued an undoubted vocation with prodigious industry and profound common sense. In the art—as well as in the craft—of general practice, John Bradley could not have found a better teacher or one who knew that complicated job more thoroughly.

For all that, the year he spent in the tall house in Boulton Crescent, arming himself for his second assault on the Apothecaries Hall and imbibing the doctor's practical wisdom which, in later life, was to prove itself even more important, had, in memory, a quality that was oddly dreamlike and restless. To begin with, he worked almost incessantly. Though nothing short of mortal emergency was allowed to disturb Dr. Medhurst's night's sleep or his after-dinner folding of the

hands, there was no moment of the day or night at which the tyrannous surgery-bell might not jangle, and his assistant was always on duty. It was John's first experience of the slavery of General Practice, which knows no end. Dr. Medhurst had made it a rule (and this rule was one of the main causes of his popularity) that every summons, however trivial or indefinite it might seem, must be attended to immediately. It was safe to say there was no urgent necessity in seventy-five per cent of his emergency calls; but in the remaining quarter immediate treatment was needed and the lack of it might spell disaster, and the deuce of it was that one never knew which was which. In either case such visits were always paid for in cash. Half a crown was the fee for visit and medicine, and the medicine—"tasting like the devil, with plenty of 'body'"—was never surrendered until the fee had been paid. Consultations (with medicine) in the surgery cost one and sixpence. Midwifery cases, of which he booked nearly two hundred in a year—which implied his assistant's spending an average of three nights a week in his bed—brought in half a guinea apiece, out of which, sixpence, by immemorial custom, went to the nurse: a profitable form of blackmail—for it was the midwives, in nine cases out of ten, who recommended the doctor.

It took a good many visits at half a crown and surgery consultations at one and sixpence to keep Dr. Medhurst in step with his great boon-companion, who

never lifted a scalpel for less than fifty guineas, and to make up the fortune which he had invested so cannily in bricks and mortar. It was, in fact, the sheer volume of his practice rather than its anxieties that made his assistant's task such a grinding labour. Dr. Medhurst never worried himself over his cases. If "the thing he aimed at was practicable" (*vide* John Hunter), and his vast experience soon showed him when it was, he attended his patient conscientiously. If he had any doubts he shoved him into the Infirmary, which was providentially next door. His patients were always admitted, for the porter was an ally of his and knew he was sure of a bottle of port-wine and a box of cigars at Christmas.

But it *was* a hard life, Dr. Bradley remembered, and the hardest thing about it was the loss of half his sleep and the precariousness of an existence wherein there was no instant in which one could count on freedom. Against these disadvantages he could set the benefits of a training in every variety of general practice, which he could hardly have enjoyed anywhere else—particularly in the treatment of common ailments, colds, muscular rheumatic pains, stiff necks, migraines, neuralgias, together with the vague conglomerated afflictions of old age, which are rarely seen in hospitals yet between them cause a greater accumulation of pain, annoyance and discomfort and loss of efficiency than all the spectacular disasters of surgery put together; those minor ills, hardly mentioned in

textbooks, which absorb the attention of every general practitioner and earn him his daily bread.

During his year at Boulton Crescent he rarely visited less than twelve houses a day. (Twelve times two and sixpence are thirty shillings; three hundred and sixty-five times thirty shillings makes five hundred and forty-seven pounds: Dr. Medhurst, who paid him a hundred a year, was not doing badly!) What was more, the very conditions of such a practice, which were a perpetual race against time, made quick diagnosis and swift decision a habit, and later an instinct. Luckily for him (but unluckily for his patients) the area of Dr. Medhurst's practice was small and congested. It covered the slopes of the hill-side above Boulton's Brook in a small-meshed network of streets which had been "run-up" rather than built during the Crimean War, and commemorated that conflagration, so happily timed for North Bromwich, in their names, Sevastopol Street, Raglan Street, Alma Street, Inkerman Street—a whole galaxy of forgotten military glories enriching an inglorious scene. Behind and between these streets lay a congeries of courts, neither better nor worse than the ones of the Red Barn Road; and amid them, isolated like rocks in a stagnant, unsavoury pool, rose Dr. Medhurst's tall house and the sombre block of the North Bromwich Infirmary.

John soon knew this teeming warren of blue-brick pavements by heart; he learnt also to know the Jewellers' Quarter, which sprawled over the slope on

the farther side of the Winsworth Road, where, in grimy workshops approached by dim passages and rickety wooden stairways, bleached men, with watchmakers' lenses stuck in their orbits, achieved miracles of delicacy in the mounting of diamonds and rubies and sapphires and emeralds; where the wooden benches above which they pored were strewn with jewels worth more than any one of them could make in a lifetime, where sheets were slung beneath their knees to catch the least falling fragment and the very dust they inhaled or swept from the floor was a powder of malleable gold and precious stones.

This quarter, so impressive in the contrasts between its contents and its surroundings, exercised a peculiar fascination over Jacob Medhurst. It was the only part of his territory in which he ever wasted time. He had made many friends among the working jewellers and acquired, through his passionate interest in their value rather than in their beauty, some expert knowledge of stones. He would stand for half an hour at a time by the jewellers' curved benches, discussing in technical terms the merits or defects of individual jewels. He loved to handle stones and hold them up to the light and examine their cutting critically through the watchmakers' lenses. This was mainly, John thought, a symptom of his consuming interest in the worth of everything in terms of money, of the kind of sensual pleasure he derived from handling the equivalent of great value in a little space. He habitu-

ally carried large sums about him in gold, and would listen ecstatically to the crackle of bank-notes or the jingle of sovereigns in his trouser-pocket while he waited for a patient to rake together the coppers and sixpences that made up his half-crown fee. On Saturday nights, when he spilt his weekly takings on his desk in the surgery, and sorted them with his plump ringed fingers, his little eyes gloated childishly over the coins as they gloated over his food. Yet, in spite of this foible, the man was essentially generous. Part of his interest in the jewellers' workshops was due, no doubt, to the showy knick-knacks he bought from them and presented, in vain competition with Simpson-Lyle, to the pretty ladies with whom they diverted themselves in the green-room of the Queen's Theatre.

A gross old man. A cynical, crude old man. In some ways, a wicked old man. Yet the prevailing impression of him, and the one that remained, was that of wisdom. Over and again, during his long working life, Dr. Bradley had found himself profiting by some chance memory of Jacob Medhurst's shrewdness and insight. He had worked him to death for a pittance, yet when the balance was struck he was prepared to admit that it remained in his teacher's favour.

The real reason, of course, why John Bradley's memories of this period were so confused and dream-like was the fact of his being in love with Clara Medhurst. Through his days of tramping over the blue-brick pavements, through his nights of long vigil spent

in the practice of midwifery—which now, thanks to Jacob Medhurst's convincing statistics, held no more terror—during the crowded surgery-hours when he compounded medicines in the dispensary, ringing changes on Dr. Medhurst's peal of ten stock-mixtures, and in those rarer moments in which he resolutely compelled himself to read for his "final," the idea of Clara Medhurst ran as an undercurrent in the stream of his thoughts. Even when he closed his eyes to sleep her image persisted, like that of some dazzling splendour that leaves its shape defined on the retina long after the source of illumination has vanished.

The mere fact that she existed filled his life with an odd exaltation; it invested all his surroundings, unromantic as most of them were, with something of her private radiance, so that the ugly blue-brick pavements, the smoke-grimed back-to-backs, the sordid courts they surrounded, and the whole grim quarter in which he worked were more spacious and splendid, simply because she lived in the midst of them. It was an oddly rarefied emotion of a kind which is only capable of absorbing a body and mind that are young and virginal; so highly idealistic, in its beginnings, that it asked nothing in return for his passion save that she should continue to exist and be seen and sweeten life by her presence. It was too timid to proclaim itself, too innocent to be possessive, far too humble to aspire to reciprocation—for the more he exalted Clara's exquisiteness, the more conscious he became of his own

lack of any quality which might commend himself to her, of his ignorance, his uncouthness, his social inferiority, his inability to make the best of himself even as he was.

Not that he had much opportunity of doing so: her uncle kept him on the run too constantly for that. The times when he saw her most frequently were at breakfast, when he came in jaded and haggard, as likely as not, from a half-guinea midwifery case and when her delicate freshness seemed to him, by contrast, like that of an early morning in spring; at middle-day dinner, when Dr. Medhurst's expansive zest absorbed her, and during the sacred hour when the doctor retired to the gilt Empire drawing-room and "folded his hands." Even then he was not allowed to see Clara alone. Janet's smouldering eyes were always intently, and (as he thought) critically, observing them. That faint flicker of amusement and mischief and contempt never far from her lips increased his awkwardness, and her words, when she spoke, seemed purposely designed to "show him up." After a few days of her acquaintance he had no doubt as to which of them it was who had laughed as they watched him standing on the doorstep.

Clara herself was more kindly than her sister, but more remote. Janet's sharp tongue and mocking smile at least acknowledged his existence, if only as figuring in a human comedy that entertained her; but Clara seemed always deliberately a little withdrawn—partly,

no doubt, because she was aware of Janet's scrutiny, partly too, he hoped, because she remembered, as he did, the embarrassment which had overwhelmed them both at their first meeting, and was taking no more risks of a recurrence. John was glad to think she had not forgotten that significant moment. Though Janet seemed superficially the more brilliant of the pair, and was certainly the bolder, there was nothing passive or listless about Clara. Her mind was as quick as her sister's, though less demonstrative, her sense of humour as lively, though less ready to wound. Her small body was actually sturdier than Janet's and her nature more practical. It was she, in fact, who "ran" that well-ordered house and disciplined the vagaries of Lizzie the maid, whose intelligence, though willing, was none too bright, and who feared Janet, but was attached to Clara with a blind, sub-human devotion. There was always, beneath Janet's dark distinction of person and the quick flashes of wit or malice that enlivened her eyes like lightning-play behind clouds, a certain indolence, the detachment of a mind that was prone to brood rather than act: the result of a physique that was capable of sharp spurts of energy, but unable to sustain them. While Clara was always busy, yet never flustered, there were long periods in which Janet Medhurst appeared to be contentedly submerged in secret dreams of her own or in the books with which she was always supplied from the Central Library; and the temperamental difference between her and her sister

declared itself outwardly, John thought, in their hands for while Janet's fingers were long and tapering and lax with the most perfect filbert-nails, Clara's hands, though no less shapely, were small and firm, precisely capable and co-ordinated in all their movements. In shape, though more carefully tended, they reminded John Bradley of his mother's. He was not surprised when he discovered that Clara was the pianist whose brilliant tinklings had impressed him on the day when he first set foot in the house on Boulton Crescent and still impressed him—not because he knew anything about music, which was an art of which he was ignorant and unappreciative, but because these agile evolutions of the firm fingers implied a physical deftness and delicacy that seemed to him the more admirable on account of its contrast with his own ungainliness. But while Janet's eyes (and sometimes a teasing word with a hidden sting in it) discomforted him by emphasizing that contrast, Clara took his ungainliness for granted, as a quality that was natural to him, and was even ready to protect him from her sister's teasing. For this mercy alone he would have loved her.

They were both of them used, no doubt, to young men falling in love with them more or less seriously. The economy of Jacob Medhurst's practice demanded the engagement of a succession of unqualified assistants like himself, who "put in" a few months or a year and earned their two pounds a week before taking their diplomas. That was why, as Clara admitted long after-

wards, they had stood at the curtained window and watched him waiting on the doorstep, wondering what sort of new specimen would emerge from the lottery.

("But you laughed," he told her. "I know, for I heard you laughing. You thought I looked awful, didn't you?")

"We thought you looked rather tall. Janet said she was certain the bed would have to be lengthened. And you *were* awkward, Johnny; you know you were—rather long-legged and untidy, like a young colt. You're not exactly graceful even now, my love, are you?")

It was partly because of this too that for several months after his arrival, when he was already suffering the torments of a suppressed passion, John found both the sisters consistently friendly, but always elusive. Another reason for their deliberate elusiveness was the fact that Jacob Medhurst was not only the benevolent tyrant who teased and was teased by Janet and looked to Clara for his entertainment—he was musical in an elementary way and liked her to play to him—but also capable of a fierce possessive jealousy. The girls knew that if they displayed the least preference for John Bradley above his predecessors, the poor young man's goose would not only be cooked, but burnt to a cinder, and that they would soon see the last of him. He was suspicious too. More than once when he had left John behind with them and retired to the

drawing-room for his after-dinner nap, he suddenly appeared, blinking in the dining-room doorway, a grotesque figure, with his handkerchief still spread over his flushed scalp making some obvious excuse that did not hide his anxiety to assure himself of his nieces' good behaviour.

Was that also the reason, John sometimes asked himself in those hot, frustrated hours, why Janet never left him alone with Clara? Was she protecting her sister by this over-zealous chaperonage—or was she, too, jealous—not because she found John attractive herself (he never considered himself attractive to any woman) but merely because she grudged Clara his possible attentions? Had she even guessed that he was in love with Clara. That question was equally unanswerable, though there were moments in which he felt his heart must surely be laid bare by those smouldering eyes, which sometimes quickened so piercingly. But then, never in all his life could he pretend to understand Janet Medhurst or fathom the depths of a mind from which, whenever anything emerged, it was always unexpected and often shrewdly embarrassing. She lived in a sombre, secret world of her own, the inmost recesses of which not even her sister could penetrate; nor even when, later on, he tried to make Clara explain Janet's mystery, could she satisfy him. There was always something opaque and provocative about her.

There was nothing opaque about Clara: her nature

was as pellucidly clear as those candid eyes of hers. Her life was so crowded with domestic activities that even if her mind had been as subtle as her sister's she could not have found time to indulge in romantic speculations. If John Bradley had shown any predilection for Janet, she would probably have noticed it—and considered it natural. She took it for granted that all the young men who came as assistants to Dr. Medhurst would, sooner or later, succumb to Janet's indolent charms, which were admittedly so much more striking and alluring than her own. That was usually the reason for their abrupt departure; for even when this inevitable infatuation did not play havoc with their work, as it usually did, Jacob Medhurst's little red eyes were quick to discern the first signs of it, and it pleased him to demonstrate his authority by discharging the victim: there could never be more than one Pasha in that little harem.

Even so, as time went on, John Bradley became timidly aware of an increasing sympathy, if of nothing more definite, between Clara and himself to which Janet's greater detachment and subtlety contributed. Their natures were both of them, compared with hers, so uncomplicated, so much more ready to take things at their face value, to accept one another on a simpler plane. And John, taking courage from her frankness, became gradually less shy, so that now, when they talked together, he was no longer perpetually conscious of Janet's mute and cynical reservations and spoke his

mind; while Clara, listening to him the more sympathetically because of her sister's remote unconcern, and touched by his very guilelessness, perceived that John was nothing more, after all, than a young man of transparent honesty, alone in the world, courageously cheerful, engaged in an uphill struggle against handicaps of birth and upbringing which, even if she had suspected their existence, had hitherto seemed no concern of hers.

But since he had grown more familiar with the two girls and talked more freely of himself, in spite of Janet's discouragement, Clara began to realize how heavy the odds against him had been and still were; she understood what a serious affair his last year's failure in London had been, and saw him now as something more than an uncouth lad who had come blundering into their lives like the other assistants. In this new view his very uncouthness became a point in his favour. It wasn't his fault. Considering his history, John was almost surprisingly presentable, and a proper object for sympathy rather than scorn. And why, after all, should Janet be—or affect to be—so fastidious? Her talk about their coming of “yeoman stock” didn't alter the fact that their grandfather had been a butcher or that their uncle, for all his knowledge and wealth and astuteness, was a coarse, and in some respects a revolting man.

She encouraged him to talk about himself, defying Janet's deliberate affectation of boredom; and John

innocently, eagerly responded to her encouragement. He told them of his childhood in Lesswardine, of the pony-drive where he had seen his father killed, of the comic (but so important) interlude of his service with "Dr." Mortimore, and of the unexpected wind-fall that had altered his life. She noticed that he was oddly reticent about his mother. All these young men, Janet said, dragged in their mothers sooner or later: it was a bad sign and to be suspected as a prelude to sentiment. But John did not, and Clara wondered why he avoided mentioning her, for the picture he gave of his father did not account for a certain delicacy in his behaviour which, in contrast with his physical roughness, was startling and also appealing. Curiosity drew her to the dangerous subject.

"What was your mother like, Mr. Bradley?" she said, then checked herself, asking no more, for she saw his embarrassment. Perhaps, she thought, the question implied was painful because he had loved his mother and she was dead.

"I haven't seen my mother for years, Miss Clara," he told her. "I don't even know where she is: you see she re-married. But she was a little woman. I think of her as a girl, though of course that's ridiculous. She was dark, but otherwise, rather like you. At any rate," he went on rapidly, conscious of his boldness, "her hands were like yours."

He saw Janet's eyebrows go up and the flicker of amusement on her lips, and all his boldness left him.

Clara, too, had seen Janet's face and John's quick confusion. She was flattered to think that he had noticed her hands, which were so much less noticeable than Janet's and anxious to atone for her sister's smile and to put him at his ease.

"I'm glad you think my hands are like your mother's, Mr. Bradley," she said seriously, though afterwards, when she came to think of it, that seemed an odd, inconsequential thing to have said. No wonder Janet had not even attempted to suppress her next smile when she heard it!

Yet Clara was glad, all the same. Since she had come to know and to understand John better, her attitude towards him had become, in a vague way, protective and maternal. She was more than a year older than he; and that of itself (since at their period of life young women were admittedly more mature than young men of the same age) gave her an excuse for taking the lead. There were so many ways, it seemed to her, in which she could help him: in his rustic speech, which Janet mimicked so wickedly even in his presence; in his clothes, which were so lamentably ill-cut and old-fashioned, though he never suspected it; in a few minor solecisms of behaviour of no real importance which, if her sister had not underlined them, she would not have troubled to correct. She began to think of him, indeed, as an unformed creature, oddly young for his years and simple and sensitive, to whom it was her privilege, in defiance of an unsympathetic world,

to give her protection and a politer shape.

The process demanded great tact and delicacy, for her growing tenderness made her shrink from hurting him or spoiling the naïveté which she counted as the greatest of his charms. But John Bradley was amazingly submissive and deferent to her maternal wisdom (though it was to her beauty, not to her wisdom that he submitted) and the fact that he took her corrections so humbly and followed them so eagerly touched her and encouraged her to persist in them, affording her the kind of creative pleasure that a little girl finds in dressing her dolls. Yet John, as she knew, was no puppet. Her uncle himself admitted that he was the best assistant he had ever had, and the admission increased her proprietary pride in him. He was no fool, as was shown by the quickness with which he adopted her suggestions. In his own dark, rough-hewn way, he was becoming, to her prejudiced eyes, as handsome as well as a virile and capable young man. It seemed to her a pity that, at the end of the year when he took his diploma, as he almost certainly would by her uncle's account, he would pass on before her formative work was completed and be lost for ever in an untrustworthy world where, as likely as not, some other woman, inferior and predatory, would impose herself on his simplicity and "get hold of" him, ruining her work and, quite possibly, his life. It seemed to her odd, sometimes, that John did not respond to her interest more warmly. If he had done so, of course,

the situation would have become more difficult; but the fact that she could consider the possibility of his making love to her without being shocked might have warned her that her interest in him was not quite so purely constructive and maternal as she imagined. It might merely show how much he respected her—which was, in one way, flattering. In any case, the poor boy was mortally shy. And perhaps, like all the rest, he was in love with Janet. That, indeed, would be tragic. For John Bradley, of course. Janet would find it a joke, as usual.

Jacob Medhurst, fortunately, remained unaware (as Janet did not) of these searchings of the heart in both of them. He did, however, for very different reasons, share Clara's dislike of the idea of John's leaving Boulton Crescent. This young man suited him to perfection. He was as strong as any horse and more willing than most. He had plenty of common sense and an even temper. The patients liked him because he put on no airs: they did not complain when he called instead of his master. His head was not stuffed, as most of these young men's were, with a lot of new-fangled ideas that were useless, and even a nuisance, in general practice. So far as it went (and that need not be very far) his knowledge of everyday medicine was sound, and he was not above learning. So far he had shown no signs of making a fool of himself over either of the girls. That was a great comfort too. What

was more—and most important of all—Jacob Medhurst liked him personally: in his likes and dislikes, as in everything else, there were no half measures about this gross, ruthless, generous, capable man.

As they sat counting out the week's takings on the Saturday night before John was due to go up to London for his second attempt at his "final," the doctor came out with a new and momentous proposal.

"Look here, my lad," he said. "I suppose you think you're going to pass this examination?"

"I think I've a pretty fair chance, sir?"

"Yes, yes. So do I. Considering the number of damned fools that qualify, you'd have to have pretty bad luck if you didn't. You'll get through all right. If you don't, you'll come back to me here. That's understood, isn't it?"

"I should like to come back to you, sir: but I hope I shan't have to."

"And if you do qualify?"

"I shall begin to look for a practice."

"H'm . . . Stick up your plate somewhere? Squat? Is that it? That won't make you popular."

John saw his little eyes narrow and guessed what it meant. Dr. Medhurst was wondering whether he was going to "play fair," as he would have put it. In theory the law gave every man with his name on the Medical Register the right to pursue his calling wherever he would. In practice, this freedom was qualified by the arbitrary sanctions and taboos of vested

interests, of which the law had no cognizance. The doctor who "put up his plate" without first buying the goodwill of an established medical practice, immediately became a moral and social outcast, with the hands of all his so-called colleagues against him. Only once had an impudent (and not very formidable) cockerel dared to challenge the rights Jacob Medhurst exercised on his own midden. He had fought the intruder, with all his native tenacity and no nice choice of weapons, until the wretched fellow was crushed and compelled to retire. But John Bradley had already made himself popular in the district. Suppose he established himself, as he had the right to do, on the northern edge of the practice, where the town was still growing? It was the suspicion that such an idea might be in his mind that narrowed Jacob Medhurst's eyes and flushed his bald scalp.

"That won't make you popular," he repeated.

"I shan't stick up my plate," John told him. "I shall buy a practice."

"Buy a practice, eh? And who the devil will lend you the money for that?"

John laughed. "I shan't have to borrow, thank heaven. I've enough money of my own."

"Enough of your own?" Medhurst stared at him incredulously. He glanced at the pile of silver on the table, as though it had crossed his mind that John might have spent the last year in stealing the money paid to him, though, indeed, the greedy interest he

gave to his takings, week by week, would surely have made any theft on a large scale impossible. "Well, that's news to me," he said. "How much have you got?"

"About six hundred pounds."

"Well, I'm damned. You're a dark horse, my boy, a dark horse. H'm . . . to think of that? Now, look here," he went on, with an impressive air of craftiness, "I've a word of advice to give you. Don't be in too great a hurry to set up on your own. You've a lot to learn yet. Many a wiser man than yourself has made that mistake, and Cartwright will bear me out in this if you care to ask him. When you've taken your L.S.A., why not come back here for a bit? I've liked your work, and we've got on well together. Six hundred pounds sounds a lot to you, but it's none too much. You could do with a bit more than that. Why not stay on here, when you're through, as a qualified assistant? I'll pay you double what I'm giving you now. Yes, three pounds a week, as well as your lodging and keep, and you can save every penny of it as I did when first I started. Stay here for a couple of years, say, and make your six hundred nine. And at the end of that time, if we still see eye to eye, I might even think of a partnership. Though there's plenty of life in me yet, I'm not quite so young as I was. We'll say no more of it now; but just think it over. H'm. . . . I never knew you had any money of your own, and Cartwright never mentioned it. Well, you know how to

keep your mouth shut, and that's one thing in your favour; but if you don't jump at that you're a bigger fool than I take you for. Think it over, my boy."

John Bradley didn't jump at it. A year's continuous work as an unqualified assistant at Boulton Crescent was about as much as he could stand. If he were qualified, his chief would be able to unload even more on him. It was true enough, as Jacob Medhurst said, that he still had a lot to learn, but doubtful if he would learn much more than he knew already in a practice where sheer pressure of work and the tyranny of the ten stock-mixtures made it impossible to give every case the attention that some deserved. Lightning diagnosis and standardized treatment might be all very well just so long as no slip occurred and Medhurst's luck held. But, if John Bradley had, as he believed, a vocation for medicine, Boulton Crescent was not the place in which to fulfil it. Against this conclusion he could not help weighing the enchanting prospect of two more years in Clara's company, though, if he accepted her uncle's offer it seemed probable that he would see less and less of her. In any case the examination came first. If he failed in it, he might be forced to continue his grim work at Boulton Crescent, with that exquisite compensation. If he passed and took his diploma, his position would be very different. As a qualified medical man, with a small capital of his own and the right to earn a living as his own master, he might dare, at last, to open his heart

and ask her to share his new life with him.

This time, he drove straight from Euston to King's College Hospital, where Lacey, now a house-surgeon, was studying for the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. Lacey had promised, in a hurried letter, to make up a shake-down for him in his own room, which showed, at least, that he hadn't forgotten him. John looked forward to their meeting eagerly, but a little anxiously. It was now more than two years since Lacey had left North Bromwich. John was aware of great changes in himself and wondered how much his friend might have changed. Even at the time when they parted, Lacey's course, which up till that point had run parallel with his own, had begun to diverge. Two years was a longish time; and if Lacey's development along the new line had been more rapid than his own—as seemed probable—heaven only knew what astronomical distance might separate them now.

In externals, at least, his friend seemed hardly to have changed at all. John recognized, with a thrill that re-kindled his ancient hero-worship, Lacey's classic distinction of bodily shape and feature, with its contradictory suggestions of indolent ease and tensile strength; that swift blue glance, so candid and yet so penetrating. The lips were, perhaps, a little more firmly set than of old; but the quick words that issued from them had the same bright ring, the same precision and finish, like that of new-minted gold, and the voice still possessed the same light, melodious quality.

On the surface, indeed, it seemed as if he, unconsciously, had changed more than Lacey.

"Why, John, I should hardly have known you," Lacey chaffed him. "I believe you're at least a couple of inches taller and a stone heavier. If the bed they've put up doesn't hold you, it won't be my fault. These magnificent whiskers! And such stunning smartness! What we call being 'got up to kill.' You'll impress the examiners no end. I feel that there must be a lady somewhere in the offing. Nothing else could account for this unusual elegance."

John Bradley laughed. He was thankful that Lacey had discovered his secret so quickly. One of the things to which he had looked forward most eagerly in this reunion was the opportunity of confessing it, of opening his heart, for the first time, to a friendly human being; and the fact that Lacey had broken the ice would make the plunge easier. As they lay in their beds and talked far into the night, with the rumble of London traffic surrounding them like an uneasy sea, he broached the crucial subject and poured out his story. Lacey listened in silence; but that silence, John thought, was not encouraging. It drove him to eager rhapsodies on the subject of Clara's perfections; but the more he enlarged on them, the less convincing they seemed. He had an awful feeling that, for all his protestations, this passion, which he knew to be sublime and unique in human history, had already been contemptuously judged by his friend as a frivolous

entanglement of the most common order. He went on in desperation until it seemed as if the very air of the room rejected his foolish ardour, then demanded, fiercely, what Lacey thought of it.

"Well, it's hard to say," Lacey told him. "You're evidently pretty hard hit, if that's what you mean. And the lady, by your account, has all the virtues and graces. I'm not surprised you came down in your 'final' last year if you've got it as badly as that."

"That had nothing whatever to do with it," John answered hotly. "At that time I'd not even met her."

"You were probably sickening for the attack, John. How old is this paragon?"

"A year older than me. What the devil does that matter, anyway?"

"It's no business of mine, I admit. So you're proposing to marry her?"

"I've not got so far as that. I wish I had. But I would if I could. Why shouldn't I?"

"Of course. It's an entirely personal question. I can't see with your eyes."

"If you could only see *her*?"

Lacey laughed. "Even then we shouldn't see eye to eye, I'm afraid. I can only serve one goddess at a time—and mine's Hygeia—or rather Chirurgica, if there is such a deity. I can find all the raptures I want in my work, and I should resent any thing or person that got in the way of it like the very devil. You know I went over to France and Germany last year? I had

letters of introduction to Koch and Pasteur. You've no idea what exciting things are happening over there. And here in London, you know, we're doing the most astonishing things. Take fractured patellas: you know what that used to mean—a useless leg for the rest of some poor devil's life. And why? Because nobody's dared, for the best of reasons, to open the knee-joint. The Chief has done seven, and half of them old, un-united fractures. We've wired them with silver, and not a single case has failed. Last October he read a paper and showed six of them. A superb performance, John. I'll lend you the copy of the *Lancet* in which it was reprinted. The odd thing is, you know, that if I were on my oath, I shouldn't say that Lister's a very great surgeon. His technique doesn't come near that old villain Cartwright's, let alone Simpson-Lyle's. It's the extraordinary nobility and spirit of the man that carries you away—or rather carries *me* away: some people are too obstinate to recognize it. At that meeting, for instance, a number of fellows got up—men with big names, mind you!—and started pouring cold water on the whole thing in spite of having those six successful cases under their eyes. One of them told us he couldn't believe Lister meant what he said—that when he spoke of opening a knee-joint with absolute safety he was 'instilling a dangerous over-confidence in his juniors and disciples.' And another—*you'll* hardly believe it—who said he was a believer in the antiseptic system, asked the Chief if he'd ever consent to have

his own broken patella wired by another surgeon! You see, we're still fighting, John; we're still in the thick of it. When I get back to North Bromwich I shall have to face the same thing—and I'm no Lister, heaven knows! But it's got to be done, John. I tell you, it's got to be done!"

He went on into the small hours talking. It was clear that he was as badly in need of an audience for his confession of faith as John Bradley for his confession of love; and John, feeling the fierce radiations of this white-hot enthusiasm, knew that in that incandescence his personal problems stood no better chance of illumination than a wisp of straw drawn into the heart of a blast-furnace and straightway consumed. The tender image of Clara Medhurst could no more easily persist in that fiery air. For the first time in his life he found Lacey's intellectual fervour sterile and cruel. His spirit rose up against it in anger and pity. *Hygeia*, *Chirurgica*—whatever the name of Lacey's divinity might be—he felt her akin to Moloch, the fiery destroyer whose flames shrivelled up all things that were gentle and human and lovely and young and fair. But he also knew that it would be profitless to attempt to withstand his friend's passion. It was stronger than he: it was stronger than Lacey himself. There could be no approximation now of their feelings: the lines of their lives had diverged beyond all power of recovery. Though he must still admit the rarefied quality of Lacey's enthusiasm, as something essentially fine in its

way, he felt thankful he could not share an emotion quite so inhuman. Though he still admired him, he no longer loved him as a brother. He had lost his only friend. Well, well, so be it. There was one thing in life more precious to him than friendship.

Perhaps it was just as well. He had needed the fillip of some such experience as this to jerk him out of—or into—himself. He had acquired the habit, and kept it, even after their parting, of considering his own judgment so far inferior to Lacey's that the mere fact of his having had the courage to disagree with him did him good. The doubts that remained made him anxious to prove to his own satisfaction that he wasn't the weak, sentimental victim of an unworthy infatuation which Lacey's barely-concealed contempt for his avowal implied. He was determined to prove to Lacey, too, that being in love had not weakened his chances. He entered the Apothecaries Hall next day in a truculent mood. No grudging, sour-faced rival of Simpson-Lyle's was going to intimidate him this time! They could plough him, no doubt, if they wanted to; but not one of them could aspire to the personal glory of the love which exalted him and which Lacey had despised.

This reaction of self-reliance served him well through the written examination which, in fact, he had never feared. It had not died down when he came to the *viva voce*, the only test he had dreaded; and here,

to his own surprise, he found himself on velvet. The examiner was not the dried-up scrubby little surgeon of his former experience, but a younger man with an air of distinction and a fine clear-cut face, which, but for his darkness, suggested Lacey's. As sheer luck (or perhaps providence) would have it, he examined him first on the surgery of the knee-joint; tubercular disease, resection, and such common affairs as a displaced cartilage.

"But what about a fractured patella, Mr. Bradley?" he said. "What would you do in that case?"

John took his courage in both hands. The details of Lacey's long (and so inopportune) dissertation were still in his memory.

"I should cut down on the bone and wire it, sir," he said.

The young surgeon raised his eyebrows; but there was the ghost of a smile on his lips which John took for encouragement.

"You're a brave young man, Mr. Bradley," he said.

"Of course I should use every possible antiseptic precaution, sir."

"I should think you would. Even so . . . Even so, Mr. Bradley . . ."

"I'm sorry, sir. As a matter of fact I shouldn't operate. I should send the patient to King's College Hospital to Professor Lister."

"That would be much the wiser proceeding, Mr. Bradley," the examiner said dryly. "You're not a

London man, are you? No . . . I see you come from North Bromwich. Most interesting . . . Yes. That will do. I shouldn't start opening knee-joints and wiring patellas just yet though, if I were you." He nodded, friendlily, and smiled.

Next morning, on the top of the world, he brought back the news of his success to Lacey. It was greater than he had ever dared to hope for: a first-class in surgery. Lacey glowed with pleasure, immediately:

"My dear fellow, that's splendid . . . splendid. Now you'll be able to start some really interesting work. You should try for a job 'on the house' of some London hospital. It will be just like old times. You ought really to read for your Fellowship after this."

John shook his head. "No . . . I'm going back to North Bromwich."

"You can't learn any surgery there, my dear boy. If you took on a job at Prince's you'd find yourself putting on 'soothing applications' for Borden or Cartwright."

"I shan't take a resident's job. I know my limitations. It's got to be General Practice. That's all I'm fitted for."

"General Practice be damned! Why should you waste yourself like that?"

"Well, there have to be general practitioners to give you great surgeons a living. You may be glad of the cases I send you some day."

"You may come to your senses some day, too. Never

mind: we'll talk of this later. You're in luck, by the way. A new fractured patella came in last night, and Lister's going to wire it in half an hour's time."

John looked at his watch. "I'm awfully sorry, Lacey, old man. I've only just time as it is to catch the eleven-thirty from Euston."

"And bring back the news of your triumph, I suppose, to this pearl among women?" Lacey said bitterly.

"Well, why not?"

"Why *not*? Because Lister's operating. Do you realize what a damned fool you're making of yourself?"

"At the moment I don't realize anything. Except that, if I'm not quick, I shall miss the eleven-thirty. Thanks so much for putting me up—and putting up with me, Lacey."

He held out his hand. Lacey turned his back on him. John Bradley went.

(IV)

"And I never did see Lister operate," Dr. Bradley reflected. Was that a pity? He wondered. No doubt it was a pleasant thing in old age to look back on the memory of great spectacles, the glimpses one has caught of great people. He could recall, for instance, the sight of a dumpy little woman in a widow's bonnet driving in a carriage with outriders to the shrilling of

silver trumpets up the newly-cut swath of Corporation Street to lay the foundation-stone of the North Bromwich Law Courts. One clung to memories of that kind not so much because they were important or added anything to one's experience, but because such distant memories signified a proud achievement in the mere matter of having lived a long life and "retained" as they said "one's faculties." And indeed what he remembered most vividly now of this great spectacle in the First Jubilee Year was not the sight^② of the Widowed Queen in her state victoria, but that of his wife's flushed face, so young and so eager, under the gay-flowered bonnet with which she had smartened herself for the occasion. It was the smaller events, the little emotions that returned most poignantly.

He had certainly felt no regret at having thrown away the chance of seeing Lister operate, as he sat in the train that carried him back that day to North Bromwich. His refusal had provided him with a satisfactory gesture: a striking means of showing Lacey how he resented his superior attitude towards his romance, a blow in defence of Clara. He was not only still sore from the effects of Lacey's sarcasm, but also in a somewhat exalted and aggressive mood and not prepared to stand "nonsense" from anybody. The five years of struggle were over. He was no longer an irresponsible medical student, but a qualified member of a learned and respected profession: John Bradley, Esquire, Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries. He

had fought for his footing in the world and found it. He was going to plan his life and live it in his own way without leave or direction from anybody.

As he sat in the train, impatiently watching the time, he made out his programme. To begin with, he was going to ask Clara Medhurst to marry him. That came first of all, not merely as being most urgent and important to his own peace of mind, but because marrying her was the very foundation on which all the rest of his programme rested. Though she had given him no reason for hoping, he felt sure she would accept him: this unreasoning self-confidence was one of the attributes of his triumphant mood. He would not, for a moment, consider applying for a hospital appointment in London, as Lacey had suggested. He would not even "put in" for Cartwright's house-surgeonship, which he knew would be his for the asking. He had no illusions as to his powers and his limitations. Like John Hunter, he knew the thing that was practicable; and the only thing practicable was the career at which he had originally aimed: the life of a general practitioner in which, even before qualifying, he had proved his competence. He was not going to continue working for Jacob Medhurst as a qualified assistant. That kind of practice was neither fair to himself nor to his patients: what was more, if he married Clara, he had no intention of living with her as a lodger in her uncle's house. He was determined, with the small capital he had left, to buy a practice—not, as Jacob

Medhurst had feared, on the borders of his own, but somewhere on the city's outskirts, where there was fresh air to breathe. After all, he had been born a countryman. His six years in North Bromwich had been a necessary purgatory, but the Paradise he was going to share with Clara should not be contaminated by the crowded city's noisomeness nor shadowed by its smoky pall. They could not settle, as would have pleased him best, in the heart of the country. A country doctor needed a horse and trap, and there was nothing to spare for such luxuries; and, even if he could have afforded it, the responsibility of a single-handed practice, remote from hospitals, was rather more than would be easy to bear. Somewhere betwixt the black and the green, within reach of sweet air and sweet peace, but not too far from North Bromwich. There must be plenty of places like that on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire borders. There was no hurry. He would take his time looking for something that suited them both, for Clara, naturally, would have her say in the matter. The whole situation was crystal-clear and full of promise. John Bradley had never felt so buoyantly happy or so sure of himself.

As the express approached North Bromwich, a quarter of an hour late, the high colours of this enchanting picture began to fade. For one thing, it was past two o'clock. He had been far too strung-up to eat any breakfast that morning and was now faint with hunger. By this time the middle-day dinner at

Boulton Crescent had certainly been cleared away, and in any case he had not warned the Medhursts that he was returning, for the cream of his triumphant announcement would be its unexpectedness. He could easily have snatched a sandwich in the station refreshment room, but his hunger to set eyes on Clara was stronger than any physical pang. Moreover, if he wasted any more time, Jacob Medhurst might have awakened from his after-dinner torpor, and the chance of catching Clara alone would be lost.

When he left the Grand Midland station it was beginning to rain. A mass of dirty grey vapour drooped over the valley below Boulton Crescent. The sky grew ominously dark; no light was reflected from the greasy cobble-stones. Under the influence of this depressing atmosphere his high spirits began to wilt. It was hardly fair to propose to any woman, he felt, on such an abominable day, in a sulphurous gloom that would dim the glow of the rosiest future imaginable. As he pounded up-hill to Boulton Crescent, though his determination held firm his courage was dwindling. For the first time since the morning's triumph had turned his head, doubts entered it: he began to ask himself if "the thing was practicable." By the time he reached the steps of the house, his heart was cold with dread of the moment to which he had looked forward so boldly. He remembered the day when he had first presented himself on that doorstep. He remembered the sense of somebody watching from

behind the lace curtain and the sound of Janet's laugh.

It would be wiser, he thought, not to ring the front-door bell, but to enter the house by the surgery entrance: by sheer luck he had gone away with the key in his pocket. He slipped through the surgery as quietly as he could, and moved on tiptoe into the passage that led to the front of the house so stealthily that the little maid Lizzie, who sat eating her solitary meal in the kitchen and saw him passing the open door, gave a choking gasp of terror.

"Oh, dear, Mr. Bradley," she said, with her mouth full, "you *did* give me a start coming in quiet like that. I thought it was . . . well, I don't really know what I thought. Have you had your dinner? I've just cleared the table."

John told her not to worry about his dinner and asked where everybody was.

"The master's taking his nap as usual," she said, "and Miss Janet's gone out to the library after a book. Miss Clara's alone in the dining-room."

He thanked heaven for that: fortune favoured the timid, it seemed, for once in a way. He opened the dining-room door. The room was dim; the yellowish light of the sky hardly reached the table at which Clara Medhurst was sitting, a pen in her hand, her brows knitted above the day-book from which she was busy transferring accounts to the ledger. She looked up, almost as surprised as Lizzie, at his stealthy arrival.

"Mr. Bradley," she said, "how you startled me!

We didn't expect you so soon. You never said you were coming. Is it . . . is it all right?"

"Yes. It's all right. I'm through. I caught the first train I could after the results were out."

"Oh, how splendid!" She glowed. "I've been thinking about nothing else all morning."

"Have you really been thinking of me?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course. Isn't that natural?"

"Because . . . if you have," he blundered on, "I want to ask you a question. That's why I hurried back. I couldn't wait till I'd asked you and you had answered. Will you marry me, Clara?"

She looked at him solemnly. There was no surprise in her eyes, yet her silence tortured him. Then she smiled, as though she were aware of his anxious suffering.

"Yes, John, I'll marry you," she said quietly. "But it won't be easy," she sighed. "It won't be easy for either of us."

CHAPTER SIX

(1)

It proved to be more difficult than either of them anticipated: Jacob Medhurst was still to be reckoned with. When they announced their engagement at the tea-table that evening, his face, whose ruddy good humour was always precarious, became darkly suffused. John saw the blue vein bulge in the middle of his forehead; his small eyes grew blankly hostile like those of an angry boar; his lax lips pursed pugnaciously. It was difficult to guess what turbulent emotions—of jealousy, hatred, anxiety—surged through the hot brain beneath his flushed scalp; yet, within a moment, the shrewd intelligence had taken control. Though his small eyes were still malignant, his lips broke into an ugly smile.

“So that’s what you two have been after behind my back!” he said with a quick affectation of benevolence. “H’m . . . so that’s it, is it? Well, you can’t stop puppies rolling about when you leave ’em alone together. But as for being engaged, as you call it, that’s a different matter. There’s no hurry anyhow. Plenty of time to think it over before you make up your minds.”

"We've made up our minds, sir," John told him.

"Of course you have. But that doesn't say you won't change them. I suppose it hasn't occurred to either of you that I may have something to say about this arrangement?"

"We both hoped you'd approve, sir . . ."

"The devil you did! Well, there's no harm in hoping, Bradley. We'll have a talk about this after 'surgery' to-night."

An interview not easily forgotten. All through the two crowded hours of "surgery" that evening a brooding irritability clouded Dr. Medhurst's face. His manner was brusquer than usual. At times, in the middle of a consultation he appeared to lose himself and sat scowling at his unfortunate patients as though he hated them. No sooner had the last of them left the consulting-room than he turned on John Bradley savagely.

"Now what's all this nonsense about you and Clara?" he snarled.

"No nonsense at all, sir. We're both of us deadly serious."

"Deadly serious be damned! You're no more than a couple of children. You say you're engaged. I suppose you think you're going to get married at once?"

"As soon as we can, sir. I shall have to look for a practice."

Jacob Medhurst surveyed him sullenly. Even now

John Bradley remembered the looks of that bearded, prepotent figure which sat scowling at him from the farther side of the littered desk, one podgy fist clenched on the leather top of it, the other jingling the gold in his trouser-pocket. He saw his head thrust forward, his small eyes narrowed, his lips twitched into their ugly smile.

"What's your game?" he said suddenly.

"My game?"

"You know what I mean. A couple of days ago I made you an offer and told you to think it over. Three pounds a week."

"There was no need for me to think it over. I took your offer as a compliment . . ."

"Compliments be damned! Are you going to accept it?"

"I can't accept it, sir."

"Why the devil can't you?"

"I want to be on my own."

Dr. Medhurst laughed. "You've a fair opinion of yourself, young man. Single-handed practice at your age is a biggish responsibility. You may find yourself in a tight corner sooner than you reckon."

"I've no intention of going far from North Bromwich. I've good friends in both the hospitals, and I shall keep in touch with them."

"Not far from North Bromwich, eh?" Jacob Medhurst repeated. The little eyes grew wary. "Ha-ha! . . . I thought as much. That game has been tried

before, and it's always failed. If you think you can stick up your plate round the corner and fight me . . ."

"I don't want to fight you, sir."

"Then why the hell don't you stay with me, you bloody young fool?" His manner changed suddenly. "Sit down and listen to me. Let's put all our cards on the table. I'll admit that this business between you and Clara has strengthened your hand. If I'd known that anything of that kind was happening I should have chucked you out long ago: I'll tell you that frankly. But there it is. You imagine you've fallen in love, and I can't stop your marrying."

"It's no good trying to do that, sir."

"Perhaps. That remains to be seen. Still, there's one thing I'll tell you: I can make it a damned sight more worth while your marrying if you'll take my advice."

"I'm listening, sir."

"Ah, that's better. Now, first of all, don't forget you're ridiculously young, the pair of you. You're engaged. Well and good. But neither of you would be any the worse off for a longish engagement. There's more truth than you guess in the proverb about marrying in haste. You may take my word for that as a man of the world."

"I'm afraid, sir . . ."

"Now wait till you've heard what I have to say and don't start interrupting. I've offered you a job as assistant at three pounds a week. That's good money—

you can't deny it—and there's no reason in the world why you shouldn't save every penny of it: far more than you could put by if you were practising on your own. It isn't an easy life; you'd work pretty hard, as you know; but hard work is less wearing than responsibility, and you'd be under the same roof as Clara—which seems to be all you want . . .”

Dr. Medhurst laughed softly. It was not a pleasant laugh.

“And then,” he went on, “as things have taken this turn I'm prepared to go one better. I don't care where my money goes provided it stays in the family. Look here, Bradley, I'm ready to give you two hundred a year to stay on with me for three years. At the end of that time, provided neither Clara nor you have changed your minds and still want to marry . . .”

“Having waited three years, sir?”

“God damn it: what is three years? You talk like a middle-aged man with no life in front of him! At the end of that time, I say, I'll take you into partnership. You shall have the option now, in black and white, if you don't feel like trusting me, though my word's as good as any man's in North Bromwich. I'll contract to sell you a share of a third, increasing to a half at the end of a further period of three years. That's in six years' time: by then I reckon I shan't be too keen on practice. You'll have to pay for it, mind, as well as work for it. Eighteen months' purchase: that is the usual reckoning. But that oughtn't to worry

you with what you tell me you have and all the money you'll have saved if you don't play the fool. You know for yourself that you won't be buying a pig in a poke. By that time you'll know as much about the practice as I do."

"If you want us to wait three years . . ." John began. Dr. Medhurst broke in on him:

"For God's sake let me finish. There's another aspect of the question which may not have occurred to you, though if you've the sense I give you credit for it probably has. I may not be a rich man like old Simpson-Lyle, but I'm not a poor one. This practice has brought in a fairish income for twenty-five years. I've never denied myself anything in the way of comfort—that's not my way; but I've never spent money unnecessarily, and money accumulates. It's surprising how it mounts up when you put it away. Every penny I've ever saved has gone straight into bricks and mortar, which can't run away in the night like other investments. There are dozens of houses you must have visited down Alma and Inkerman Streets which belong to me, freehold. North Bromwich has always grown and will go on growing. When houses are scarce, rents are high and tenants so damned glad to get 'em that there's no grumbling over repairs. It isn't my way to boast—but, if I chose, I could shut up shop to-morrow and live on my property. But that's not my way either. This doctoring's the life I've chosen, the one that suits me. If I had to drop practice I

shouldn't know what to do with myself, and I give you fair warning I mean to go on till I drop. But when I *do* drop, and my will's proved, my lad, I give you my word that some of these hospital fellows 'll sit up and rub their eyes! Even Simpson-Lyle, if he lives as long as I do, will get a bit of a shock. The practice will still be there too—you'll be able to buy the rest of it on the same terms—and Janet and Clara, I give you my word, will come in for a tidy fortune. The chaps who have married those two will find they have nothing to be sorry for. There you are. *Now*, what do you say?"

He leant back in his chair, still jingling the sovereigns in his pocket. He screwed up his little pig's eyes and laughed to himself, his paunch quivering with every chuckle.

"I don't fancy the idea of waiting for dead men's shoes, sir."

"Ha-ha! And what's more, you may have to wait a damned sight longer than you think! We're a long-lived family, my lad. I may be fat, but I'm tough, and there's plenty of life in me yet, and when I feel myself failing I shall know what to do about it. But the dead man's shoes are only one side of the question. I mentioned the money that Clara will have because, as I told you I would, I'm putting my cards on the table. I know what you hold to the very last pip. You've only two trumps: your youth and your bit of capital. Let's be frank about this and admit they won't

take you far. You see what you have to gain—and lose—and I know you're no fool. Well, I'm no fool either. I reckon to know something about men. You've been with me now for more than a year, and I've kept my eye on you closer than you may think. You're straight, so far as I know, and you're a good worker with average brains and a fair dose of common sense. When you told me this afternoon that you and my Clara had some sort of understanding, it gave me a shock. I'll say more than that: if I'd done what I wanted I should have let myself go and landed you a clout on the head there and then. To tell you the truth I was damned jealous. That's natural enough. Those two girls of mine mean more to me than if they were my daughters. I've had them by me ever since they were children—ever since their father, my damn-fool brother Jim, died—and the thought of any other man touching either of them turns me savage. But I've enough sense left to know that I can't shut 'em up or keep young men off them, much as I'd like to. Their blood is the same as mine—and I'm no monk, thank God, in anything but my figure. If Clara's going to marry, as sooner or later she must, I'd a damned sight sooner she picked up a decent country chap like yourself than some rich manufacturer's son from Alvaston with no thought beyond doing himself well on the brass his father has worked for and blue-ing it. Another thing: I don't want to see this practice go down. I've made it myself, out of

nothing, and I want to see it going strong when I finish. That's why I made you this offer and won't stand in the way of you and Clara being 'engaged' as you call it—though, mind you, when first you spoke of it I was damned near showing you the door! But as for marrying: that's quite a different matter. We'll talk of that when the time comes, and that won't be just yet. I'm not turning you down, Bradley, but I don't mean to have any nonsense. I'm not going to let my girl go just to suit your convenience. Understand that once and for all. Well, what do you say, my lad? Shall we call it a bargain?"

He smiled and stretched out his fat hand. John Bradley did not take it. He feared that confident smile, that false good-humour. Jacob Medhurst had laid his chosen cards on the table, as he called it, not as a gesture of confidence but as a bait. Others remained invisible in his hand and could still be played; and though he could not guess what they were, he knew the player's subtlety and mistrusted his scruples. In a matter of bargaining he felt himself at a disadvantage and no match for either. What it came to was this: he was being bribed to suit Jacob Medhurst's convenience, to commit himself to the money-grinding treadmill he knew so well for three more years; at the end of those years he might hope for an extension of that servitude, rather better rewarded, indeed, and sweetened by marriage with Clara, but still the same. In a future even more remote he was offered a wider

freedom—a freedom gilded, almost too garishly, by Clara's inheritance. Yet he knew that so long as Jacob Medhurst lived he could not be free and that Clara could not be his. He did not trust this fat man who fawned and smiled on him. Though a contract might bind him to payments of money, John knew there was nothing on earth that could make him fulfil the rest of his bargain. He was vindictive, cunning, unscrupulous; he was playing for time; and the time he proposed was too long. In three years, who could say what might happen? Clara told him she loved him now. In three years, under the pressure of this jealous old man's machinations, she might be forced to change her mind. In three years, as far as that went, he himself might easily be dead: a doctor's life was precarious—the prick of an infected scalpel, and lo, it was gone. And why, after all, should he hesitate? He was young, self-reliant (so far having proved his powers) and in his own manner obstinate. He had planned out a course and a manner of life for himself from which not even the scorn of his idol Lacey had been able to move him. Was he to be tempted to swerve from that course by this old man's venal persuasions and flatteries? His pride in himself was revolted by the suggestion. He had listened too patiently already. Better get it over.

"I'm afraid it's no good, sir," he said. "I know that your offer is generous, and I thank you for it; but I've made my plans, and I'm going to stick to them. If you want me to stay till you can find another assistant . . ."

As he spake he was aware of a physical transformation in Jacob Medhurst. He was already acquainted with those swift storms of passion in which the high bald forehead flushed and the great vein bulged in the midst of it; but the results of the fury that rose in him now were more terrible: the whole gross body seemed to inflate and enlarge itself like a swollen leech; he rose to his feet, uncertainly swaying, his face bloated and dusky with blood like that of a man who is strangled; his bushy beard and his eyebrows appeared to bristle; his mouth foamed, his lips curled back from the yellow teeth like a snarling dog's; his small eyes were sunken and almost lost in a livid congestion of the surrounding tissues so tense that it seemed as if something must give way, as if an artery must surely burst and send him crashing to the floor in a stroke of apoplexy. He stood snorting and panting and shaking his fists and uttering inarticulate angry noises. He swayed so dangerously that John put out a hand to stay him. Jacob Medhurst lashed out at it blindly and missed; he clutched at the table to save himself and sank back into his chair, breathing heavily.

"You young dog," he gasped. "You randy young dog. . . . Get out of this house. Get out of it quick, and don't show your face here again. If I find you skulking round here I'll set the police on you. And what's more, you leave my girl alone, or I'll get a whip to you. I'll thrash you to bloody ribbons—my God I will! Now get out! What are you waiting for?"

I've done with you. . . . Here's your money——” He spilt a handful of gold contemptuously on the desk in front of him. “Take a month in lieu of notice and get out! Pick it up—what the devil's the matter with you?”

“I don't want your money, sir. But I'm going to have Clara whatever you say.”

“If the girl's enough of a fool to follow you, I can't stop her. But she'll have to pay for her fancy: I'll tell you that. She'll go with the clothes she stands up in and nothing more. Not one penny will she ever get out of me dead or living. Understand? Not one damned penny. D'you hear what I say? Not one bloody brass farthing!”

(II)

He might have known from the first, Dr. Bradley reflected, that this was how it would end. Though he had been at that age too innocent to notice such things, there had always been something a little unpleasant (though not unnatural) in Jacob Medhurst's pseudo-paternal attitude towards his nieces; and these transports of fury were even more understandable since his creature comforts—which (after money) meant more than anything else to him—depended on her capable housewifery. Though he appreciated the decorative quality of Janet's languid graces and favoured her with

rather more of his unsavoury caresses, it was on Clara that he relied for the smooth running of his home. The change in the household, and the prospect of losing her, were a menace to his stomach no less than to his pride of property. Clara would have no peace, as both the lovers knew, from his alternations of violence, self-pity and threats and cajolery, so long as she remained at his mercy in Boulton Crescent. They knew there was only one way of escape from this intolerable state: an early marriage. John put up the banns in the parish church—a mean late-Georgian building that stood almost forgotten and marooned, as it were, an oasis of quiet, in that desert of dingy brick, surrounded by a small square of heavily-railinged graveyard crammed with the pompous memorials of the respectable dead who had worshipped there and been buried when that part of North Bromwich was green.

In the meanwhile he lost no time in trying to find a practice that he could afford to buy. The quest was not easy. Apart from the fashionable suburb of Alvaston, which was too grand for his modest ambitions, the growing circumference of North Bromwich displayed a squalor not greatly different from that of the region surrounding Boulton Crescent. In the last year he had seen enough of such streets to last him a lifetime. His countryman's soul rebelled against those sad culverts lined by endless red-brick rows and blue-brick pavements down which the human tide ebbed

and flowed diurnally like ordure swinging in an estuary. In these streets, as Jacob Medhurst had found, a man who was money-minded might put by more in a shorter time than in districts less densely populated. In these crowded areas, no doubt, a doctor, young and inexperienced, could easily earn what was called "a good living." But John Bradley wanted to do other things besides that. He wanted to make an effort to practise scientific medicine. He wanted leisure to live, and leisure to love.

Even so, since Clara's mind was set on living within reach of Boulton Crescent (she was anxious—oddly, it seemed to John—not to lose touch with Janet) he set himself to examine the possibilities of the city's outer industrial belt. An old firm of wholesale druggists who conducted an agency for the sale of medical practices gave him numerous introductions. In every square mile (or less) of this mournful area stood at least one doctor's house, usually distinguished from the rest by its corner site and the fact that its dignities were separated from the street by a strip of gritty brick pavement, or, perhaps, an empty flower-bed edged with crenellated tiles, set within a wall or a railing pierced by the opening of a small cast-iron gate. Attached to each of these gates was a brass plate bearing a name (often hyphenated) and a string of qualifications. Some of these plates were aggressively new; others worn by so many years of polishing that the names of their owners were barely discernible—"the

sign of a life-sentence," John thought. Some were bright and others neglected, encrusted with verdigris: the plates of men who were still keen and of those who had ceased to care. The houses themselves rarely looked as if they were lived in. The relatively exalted social status of their occupants demanded the privacy of curtains of Nottingham lace (none too cleanly) which gave the front windows a blind look. From the angles of these corner houses, commanding two streets, there protruded, nearly always, a rusty iron bracket carrying a sooty red lamp from which the word SURGERY stood out in letters of clear glass when the wick was lit at night.

The announcement was hardly necessary. To an experienced eye these doctors' houses showed their nature unmistakably. Their contents, revealed when the visitor had made his choice between the two bell-pulls marked "day" and "night," and the "speaking-tube," displayed a similar uniformity: the same narrow hall, paved with variegated tiles or spread with threadbare linoleum, and separated from the more private part of the house by a swinging curtain of beads or bamboo; on the right, a living-room, on the left the "surgery," which had another entrance for patients opening on the street; the same mingled smells of aromatic medicaments and middle-day dinner competing for predominance in the stuffy atmosphere; the same front rooms, expensively furnished without taste, exhibited with pride but permeated by the must of

disuse; the same air of lower middle-class life, asserting its pride, attempting to preserve its precious little refinements amid surroundings that were always too strong for it; the same socially repressed and slightly forbidding doctors' wives.

John saw more of these, as a rule, than of their husbands, who were usually "out on their rounds" or "tied up with a case," or attending the subsidiary "lock-up surgeries" (some managed as many as three) in which medicine and advice were provided together for sixpence. He was sorry for these women: he found much that was admirable in them and more that was pitiable. They lived their own drab, capable lives divorced from the society of all other women of their class—save, perhaps, wives of other doctors with whom, as likely as not, their husbands were not on good terms—for in these areas competition was fierce and suspicion rife: it was each for himself (at sixpence a time) and the devil take the hindmost. He was sorry for their blemished complexions, the work-worn hands that they were still at pains to conceal; the way in which they clung to their faded gentility touched him. But what filled him even more strongly was the determination that in no circumstances whatsoever should Clara be committed to that sort of life.

He found their husbands less pathetic and generally likeable. Most of those who wished to sell practices were middle-aged products of the North Bromwich medical school, with a sprinkling of Scots and jolly

Irishmen. They had no illusions and made no bones about the character of their practice. They had embarked upon it deliberately (no less than Jacob Medhurst) as a money-making concern, a term of servitude or purgatory through which, by hard work, they could attain the paradise of a reasonably early retirement. By their lights—the bleared lights of places like Lower Sparkdale and Winsworth Green—they were honest men, giving value for money—you couldn't expect much for sixpence—and giving, freely, their not very brilliant best. They were most of them out-of-date professionally, blandly unaware of the recent advances of medicine and surgery, having read no book since the day on which they scraped through their finals. There was hardly a charlatan among them, and hardly, by modern standards, one well-qualified man. But their attitude towards their patients was not mercenary. It was conscientious, human, benevolent. They were skilled, by long use, in the vagaries of working-class psychology, aware of its delicacies, respectful of its taboos. If they scamped a large number of these unimportant cases which made up the bulk of their practice, and swallowed their sixpenny fees as mechanically as slot-machines, they were willing to spend hours over the diagnosis of a case that puzzled them, and give to the gravely ill an attention as devoted (if not as skilful) as any that money could buy. They did not pretend to be anything they were not; they admitted their professional "rustiness"; and

yet, on their own not very exalted plane, these street-corner doctors who ministered to the medical needs of perhaps two-thirds of the industrial workers of North Bromwich were, with few exceptions, honest, hard-working men.

Those whom John Bradley interviewed during his explorations did not, on the whole, appear to be discontented with their lot. They seemed proud of their houses and surgeries, and were only selling their practices because they had grown too old to cope with a life so exacting and wanted one easier, or (more rarely) had scraped together enough sixpences for a modest retirement.

"Well, doctor," they would say—John could not yet hear himself addressed by the sublime appellation without a start—"you can see for yourself what this practice is like. Nothing grand about it: but, when all's said and done, it's not such a bad little show. It's compact and easy to run, and the patients are not bad folk when you get to know 'em—though I needn't say that, of course, since you're a North Bromwich man. You'll find it a great comfort too, to have everything on a cash basis: saves the bother of book-keeping and the unpleasantness of collecting bad debts. These working-class folk are easier to deal with than black-coated chaps. They don't expect tradesmen to give them "strap" for their groceries, so why should they get their doctoring on credit? If I were a young man, like yourself, and starting life over again, I don't think I

should choose any other type of practice. The surroundings are rather against it—I don't deny that—but a man soon gets used to them. It's the women who find that more difficult—particularly at first. They're not working all day, like we are. In a small house like this, with a servant, a woman has time on her hands and nothing to do with it. It's all right when the kids are coming along; that keeps them busy; but when the young birds have flown it's a different matter. You can't expect lively young folk to think it much fun to come back to a place like Lower Sparkdale, however fond they may be of their dad and their mother. It's not reasonable, is it? Not that my missus ever complains: she's one in a thousand, bless her! But there it is. She likes flowers, you know, and has a wonderful hand with them.^c Did you notice those geraniums of hers in the bed beside the front door? Well, she wants a garden of her own, and if ever any woman has earned the right to one, she has. So we talked it over a lot and then decided between us to look out for a quiet practice down in the country, some nice little place with a garden, where the children can come for their holidays and bring their kids with them. She'd like me to retire altogether, you know. She gets worried about the cough that catches me every winter. But I'm sound enough, though I'm sixty. My heart and my kidneys are all right, and there can't be much wrong with a man who walks ten miles a day on his round without feeling it. What's more, if I gave up practice

entirely, I'm damned if I know what I should do with myself. I'm no gardener, and it would give me the pip if I had nothing to do but moon about smoking a pipe and reading the newspaper. If you'd got into the habit of a routine of work, like I have, you'd feel lost if you couldn't go into the surgery at nine o'clock every morning, and grow old before your time: that's what I tell her. And as a matter of fact, you know, I can't really afford it either. So there you are, doctor: that's the only reason I'm selling the practice; and, to tell you the honest truth, when we go, it will be a hell of a wrench to me. I shall miss the people, too. I know them, you see, and they've got into the way of trusting me."

John heard many such stories. In the list of practices for sale which the agents gave him there were, of course, exceptions: a pallid, shifty Englishman on the edge of bankruptcy; a Scot who drugged; a hearty, drunken Irishman. Yet, on the whole, these men, who, to his hopeful eyes, appeared failures, had not, in their own estimation, failed. Their lives did not seem to them lacking in grace or dignity. Their function was necessary, in existing circumstances, to the life of an ill-paid, ill-fed community, with whose health, as yet, the state had not concerned itself. They did their job, humbly, honestly, clumsily, with little material reward, on a plane of medical practice from which (thanks partly to Lacey's idealism) John Bradley shrank. If he had been a single man, he might even,

conceivably, have enjoyed it, for there was no inherent reason why work among these sad streets should be degraded. But the idea of condemning Clara to life in such surroundings could not be accepted. He spread his researches more widely.

On the south and north-east of the city were several growing suburbs, the home of those black-coated workers whom the sixpenny-doctors viewed with such disfavour. They lived in small jerry-built "villas" bordering unmade roads. They were too grand to pay their doctors cash, like the industrial workers, and too anxious to vie with one another in keeping up appearances to have money to spare for medical emergencies. Rent, transport and clothes swallowed up the greater part of their slender salaries: they were, notoriously, "bad paymasters," and the doctor's bill was usually paid last of all. In any case there were no practices for sale in these suburban areas. The doctors already established on their inner edge were generally prosperous men who, as their field work grew, employed more and more assistants to skim the cream off it. One might, it was true, without grave offence to etiquette, rent or purchase one of the newly-built villas and put up one's plate; but to start from nothing in the hope of creating a brand new practice by degrees, sitting tight in one's surgery and waiting for patients to turn up, was likely to be not merely a dreary affair but a questionable gamble in which, before a man found his feet, he might see his capital vanish—and John

Bradley's capital was too small for him to take the risk of gambling with it and with Clara's happiness.

He turned his attentions north-west to the Black Country towns—Wednesford, Dulston, Wolverbury—that lay like knots on the network of the steam-tramways—and the small town of Halesby that lay in the debatable land between Black and Green. There was small opportunity in these, and the few practices or partnerships for sale offered few attractions to offset a squalor which, if less uniform than that of the North Bromwich slum areas, seemed equally depressing. Their industrial conditions were none too happy at that time: the coal seams had begun to wear thin; the heavy industries, by which they had been nourished, were slumping. If things went much worse the population was certain to shrink, and fewer doctors would be needed.

So, moving westward, with little hope or encouragement, he came on Sedgebury . . .

(III)

It was, Dr. Bradley thought, a very different Sedgebury from that which, in rainy darkness, now enveloped him sitting at his warm fireside. Like Halesby, it was something of a compromise between black and green, a village of some antiquity straggling over the ridge of Silurian that bounded and

commanded the basin of the coal-measures. Though it lay only a few miles away from the established Black Country towns of Dulston and Wednesford, its isolation on that high ridge had preserved its individuality: it was still a village inhabited by an independent and intimate community not herded in factories but composed of small units each engaged in the manufacture of wrought-iron nails which were hammered and shaped by hand in domestic forges attached to their dwellings. It was a grim and sweating industry no doubt; yet it seemed to John Bradley that the Sedgebury folk, for all their crushing slavery, had more of human dignity and character left in them than the factory-hands of the neighbouring towns. To a certain extent these nailers were their own masters. They worked for themselves, and when they liked; if they sometimes starved, they starved of their own free will. They were a sturdy race, too, hard-pruned and toughened by the harsh air that swept the plateau.

It was the lively quality of this upland air which first struck John Bradley, when he climbed out of the smoky hollow in which Dulston lay on to the Sedgebury heights: this, and later the sense of freedom and exhilaration which suddenly uplifted him as he walked down the village street between detached houses that (but for the spaciousness of their setting) were not very different from other workmen's homes in the Black Country, to his goal—the doctor's surgery at the corner of Halesby Road and Crabb's Lane. Here,

turning his back on the smouldering pit of the coal-measures, he found himself suddenly confronted by a surprising spectacle.

Crabb's Lane, unlike those dingy thoroughfares—Steelhouse Lane, Summer Lane and the rest—which, engulfed in the heart of North Bromwich, still bore the same designation, was actually a lane. The few houses that bordered it stood withdrawn from the road, all surrounded by patches of cultivation which, if not very flourishing (for the wind scraped the ridge like a knife) were, at all events, green; while the hedgerows on either side, though ragged and writhen, had certainly, not long since, born trusses of may and sprays of wild roses: the first evidence of a natural flowering on which he had set eyes since the day he left Lesswardine.

This, alone, was enough to excite him; yet, a hundred yards farther on, where the scattered houses ceased and the track climbed a little rise, the final crest of the ridge's wavelike contour, came a greater surprise. At this point, it appeared, he had reached the limit of the coalfield's dominion: on either side and in front of him the land fell away from his feet in a chequer of green pasture and tawny arable. On the south beyond a wide trough rose the outline of two domed hills; but to westward the sweep of the eye met no such impediment, until, far away, over a billowing countryside of pallid fields (the hay had been carted) and dark blotches of woodland which distance

made more and more indistinct, it came to rest on a horizon of two mountainous shapes—one a hog's-back, the other uplifted to a proud peak, which, familiar although their positions were reversed, he instantly recognized as those of Brown Clee and Abdon Burf, the eastward hills of his childhood, now flung magnificently athwart the glowing west.

The recognition of what these distant shapes were had an odd effect on John Bradley. During his years of work in North Bromwich—and more particularly since the Munslovs' departure—he had thought of Shropshire rarely and never with any nostalgia. Yet there, within walking distance of the visible crest of Abdon Burf, lay Lesswardine and the little world of his childhood. Though it was no longer necessary to him, the fact that it was within the reach of his senses was oddly reassuring, and gave him a confidence that, for all the protestations with which he had persuaded himself and deluded others, he had lacked. Up till now, in North Bromwich, he had always seemed slightly disorientated. The mere sight of those hills provided him with a point of stability; he felt suddenly—and for the first time in many years—at home. The feeling was far too subtle to be reasoned about or analyzed; and yet—even before he had reluctantly turned his back on that scene and set himself to the practical task of investigating the advantages or defects of the practice which he had come to examine, he had determined to settle in Sedgebury—if only Clara

approved of it. And he was sure that Clara would approve.

For Clara, as he realized in spite of her gallant attempts to deceive him, was having a thin time of it at Boulton Crescent. Their meetings since his dramatic departure had been few and hazardous, the brief moments necessarily devoted to planning and scheming rather than love-making. Indeed, without the connivance and help of Janet, they would hardly have been possible, so grimly and cunningly did Jacob Medhurst set himself to frustrating them. In his eyes—both emotionally and from the material standpoint—Clara was a piece of movable property; he was not only savagely jealous of the young male who had presumed to dispute his right of possessing her body and soul, and piqued by her preference for the intruder, but also sullenly determined to prevent (if he could) the loss of an admirable housekeeper.

All the weapons he had employed against John Bradley, and many more, he now used against her: cajolements, bribes, appeals to pity and sentiment, flatteries, blandishments, menaces—the most potent of all in his eyes, the threat of cutting her out of the fortune which would have been hers. His moods changed with embarrassing quickness. One day he would bring her back from the jewellers' quarter a present of the kind with which he dazzled his mistresses, and call her his love, his poppet, his little Clara; on the next day he would sit and stare at her sulkily, grudgingly, until,

of a sudden, the blue vein bulged in his forehead and his face went purple while he told her he knew she was tricking him and that if that damned young dog Bradley came smelling round he'd horsewhip the beggar until he had cut him to ribbons. As for his money (that always, sooner or later, came in) he'd already taken good care that not so much as a bloody farthing should come her way. No, Janet, who knew where her duty lay and which side her bread was buttered, thank God, should have every penny of it. So he raved, and Clara was silent, and Janet smiled, aloof, ironic, inscrutable.

For all that Clara told him, John Bradley could never feel he had got to the bottom of Janet's mind. Clara said there was nothing there but a sort of lazy kindness: it was not malice, but rather an odd kind of humour that sharpened her tongue. With women, she said, Janet's ways were gentler than with men, against whom, since she was so attractive, she must always be on the defensive and set up her spines like a porcupine. If John only knew how many romantic young men had made themselves ridiculous about her! But John Bradley shook his head. He had feared Janet from the first, for he knew that she was far too clever for him. He suspected now that she was being too clever for Clara's simplicity. With Clara well out of the way and unsuitably married, her sister would have Jacob Medhurst's money. Hence this really surprising benevolence towards Clara and himself: her acquiescence

—mild encouragement even—in their secret meetings.

Still, however benevolent Janet might be, it was more than her peace of mind (to say nothing of her inheritance) was worth to protect or defend her sister openly. When he heard Clara's unwillingly-told and pitiful account of the tempestuous state of affairs at Boulton Crescent, John realized more than ever the urgent necessity of rescuing her from these torments. He knew Jacob Medhurst well enough to judge how formidable he was; and although he adored her, he knew Clara so little—apart from that one supreme, astonishing moment in which she had said that she loved him, and a few hurried surreptitious meetings shadowed by anxiety, they had rarely been left for more than three minutes to themselves—that he had nothing but a blind and possibly fallacious confidence on which to base his belief in her constancy. If she were ever so little weaker than he imagined her to be, she might easily ask herself whether resistance was worth so much trouble, whether peace wasn't cheap at any price. He did not distrust her courage—he believed in it passionately; but the longer she waited, the more gravely, he felt, this persecution must tire her and tell on her.

As he made his way back along Crabb's Lane that evening, strangely elated and fortified (as it were) by the sense of attachment to permanent things which that sudden glimpse of his childhood's hills had given him, he had a conviction, as strong as it was unreason-

able, that here, on the wind-swept Sedgebury ridge, he and Clara were destined to live and love and have their being. He had no idea, apart from the not very enthusiastic particulars the agents had given him, what kind of house or practice awaited his choice. Yet he felt that whatever the practice might be, he was going to buy it. He had made up his mind. If it came to the worst he was prepared to outrage convention and put up his plate. He had wandered in search of a home long and far enough. He believed he had found it.

The prospect was more encouraging than he had dared to expect. The practice was a death-vacancy. Its owner and maker, a man in the middle forties, had lately died of pneumonia. The house, which he had failed to notice although he had walked past two sides of it, stood alone at the junction of the Halesby Road and Crabb's Lane, within a hundred yards of the crest from which the great vista of the Clees had first astonished him. The doctor's widow, who received him, was a middle-aged woman. Though her face was still blank with sorrow, it possessed great dignity and, in spite of that sorrow, a repose which had been lacking in the harassed, light-starved features of the doctors' wives he had interviewed in North Bromwich.

"You must excuse me, doctor," she said, "if you find things rather in a mess. During my husband's illness, naturally, everything had to go; and since he died—well, I've hardly had the heart to put them to rights. And the practice, too, will be gone, I'm afraid,

unless somebody buys it soon. You see, it was hard to know at first how we stood financially. Our two boys are at school at Bromsberrow—the elder one's nearly finished—and there seemed to be so little money at first and so many bills to pay that I simply dared not face the expense of getting in a 'locum' as I suppose I should have done. I don't know what particulars the agents have given you; but of course you can see the books, and I can explain them if anything isn't quite clear. I always kept them myself—Walter hated figures—and did most of the dispensing as well. Would you like to see the house first?"

She showed him over it. John felt an odd awe that made him speak softly and go on tiptoe through those small rooms over which the untimely tragedy still seemed to brood; yet the woman, though crushed and, somehow, lost, displayed them with dispassionate matter-of-factness.

"It's small, but it's very compact and convenient," she said. "Walter built it himself. I came here when we were married. This, you see, was our room: the speaking-tube's by the bed. And here is the boys' room, just opposite. Sedgebury's very healthy, you know. The prevailing wind blows right out of Wales over Worcestershire and carries the smoke away. We've never had any sickness to speak of—until this happened. Then here is a room for a visitor or a maid, though we never kept one in the house. My own girl, Emma, who lives just down the lane, has been with us

twelve years: I don't know how I shall get on without her; but of course I shall never be able to afford such a luxury again. She's attached to the house: I hope, if you buy the practice, you'll let her continue to work here. Your wife . . . But there, Dr. Bradley, I don't even know if you're married!"

"I hope to be very soon."

The woman smiled at him, wanly. It made him feel very young.

"Well, if she comes here," she said, "I hope she'll be as happy in Sedgebury as I've been. I was quite a young girl when we settled here. Nineteen years ago. Yet it only seems like yesterday. These are my boys, and this is my husband. . . ."

She pointed to a photograph on the mantelpiece and turned it, to catch the light, with a lingering movement at once protective and pitiful. She gazed at the portrait tenderly, and John, glancing at her, saw this woman's plain, wholesome face immediately transfigured by a new softness that gave it an unexpected beauty.

"This was taken only last year in North Bromwich," she said. "Walter hated posing for photographs, but I'm glad I made him have it taken. It's a wonderful likeness. You can see for yourself what a strong man he was, and a good man, too."

He nodded. "Yes . . . a strong face," he murmured, conscious of the inadequacy of the repetition. He could well have said more. It was the face of a

man transparently honest and kind and resolute and serene; a just man, in the prime of life, a fit mate for this lonely, courageous woman. A far finer man, he told himself, than he could ever be. He found himself deeply affected, even more resentful than shocked, when he thought how the life of this decent, virtuous household had been suddenly, arbitrarily shattered by the blind spores of an invisible germ. Yet even while awe and pity assailed him, his trained eyes observed that this robust, short-necked man was in fact of the physical type on which the violence of lobar pneumonia was most likely to fall, the disease's predestinate prey. The widow was speaking:

"I'm wasting your time, Dr. Bradley," she said, "with these personal matters. You can see the books and the surgery for yourself. Let me tell you a little more about the practice. You probably know already what Sedgebury is. The village itself is quite old; it's been here since the middle ages, or even earlier. My husband, in his spare time (and that wasn't much) did quite a lot of research into its ancient history. If you decide to come here, I should like to leave you his notes, for I don't suppose I shall ever see Sedgebury again—indeed, I don't think I should want to. Until fifty years ago there was no industry here. There were two large farms in the parish which have now been split up into smaller holdings, and two gentlemen's houses—an old place called Cold Harbour, which has stood empty for years, and another called Silver Street,

where Lord Clun's agent, a charming Irishman, lives. Apart from the vicar and him—his name is Martyn—all our patients—even the shopkeepers—are working-class people. They're most of them nailers and dreadfully poor: it's a heart-breaking business sending out bills to them, though, after all, doctors must live the same as anyone else. And they aren't easy people either, Dr. Bradley. My husband always said they were a race by themselves: living perched up here on this ridge for centuries, you know; rather despising the Black Country folk and always intermarrying. When first we came here—there was no other doctor nearer than Dulston then—they were almost like savages. When strangers appeared, the little boys used to throw stones at them. It was quite five years before Walter felt he was accepted. But, after that, all went well. Though they're fearfully clannish they're also tremendously loyal: when once they've taken you to their hearts, as they took my husband and me and the boys, you can do no wrong. They simply worshipped Walter. During that dreadful week when he was ill his patients behaved like angels. Such kindness . . . such delicate sympathy! I shall never forget it. Of course, after nineteen years, they had come to look on him as one of themselves; but I think it is only fair to warn you that a stranger may find them difficult and rough and not easy to understand. They hate changes, anyway; and unless you make up your mind to take them for what they are and judge them by

their own standards and make your home here in spite of all sorts of discouragement, you might just as well put the thought of settling here out of your mind. I'm saying this for their sake as well as yours. You see, I owe them a great deal and I'm genuinely attached to them; and I should hate to think—you won't mind my speaking candidly?—that this little practice, which Walter built up so proudly and devotedly, was going to be frittered away and lost just—oh, how shall I put it?—for want of understanding." She smiled. "I don't sound as if I wanted to sell it, do I? Although, God knows, I must. But perhaps you know what I mean."

"Yes . . . I know what you mean. You think I'm not up to it."

"No, no. I wouldn't say that."

"You think I'm too young to tackle it?"

"That wouldn't be quite true either, though you *are* rather young. You can't have been qualified long. As a matter of fact I might almost be your mother. That's what makes me venture to talk to you like this. To tell you the truth, I think you would do quite well here—particularly if the girl you are going to marry is anything like yourself."

"You needn't worry about that," John Bradley said confidently. "If you only knew her!"

She smiled. "Of course. That goes without saying."

"She has been brought up in a doctor's house."

"Still, life at Sedgebury may seem rather lonely, with no friends of her own class, no amusements. Modern girls expect rather more diversions than we did. Not that I blame them . . ."

"Newly-married people don't need to look outside their own lives."

"Of course, that's quite true; and then there may be children."

"I hope so."

"If you are thinking seriously of coming here, I think you should bring her here to see the house. In your case, perhaps, money is not a consideration. . . ."

"It's very much so!"

"Then I think—I speak from the woman's point of view—that before you buy it . . ."

"Before we *buy* the house?"

"Didn't the agents explain? I took it for granted you knew. You see this house is my most valuable asset. They tell me that in a case of this kind, a death-vacancy in which there's nobody to give the purchaser an introduction, the practice itself—the goodwill, or whatever they call it—is unfortunately worth very little. Till the younger boy's schooling is finished I'm afraid I shall have to live on capital, and the sale of this house, though it's not very grand, will have to provide it."

"Have you any idea how much it is worth?"

"As much as it will fetch. It's been valued at nine hundred pounds, though I'd hoped for more."

"Nine hundred pounds! And the practice?"

She shook her head. "That's the part of it which hurts me most when I think of how Walter slaved at it, of the love and pride he put into it. Not so much as a twelve-month purchase. About four hundred pounds."

"Thirteen hundred in all!" He sighed. "I'm afraid it's beyond me. That's an awful lot of money."

"You wouldn't think so if it was all you had to live on with a boy at Bromsberrow. There won't be much else. You see, from the very first, my husband was determined to give our sons a good start in life, so we saved very little."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too. I don't know very much about you, of course, Dr. Bradley; but I think you're the kind of man my husband would have liked to see succeeding him, and that means rather more to me than you can possibly guess."

(iv)

He left Sedgebury that afternoon in a despairing, frustrated mood. He had seen the corner house in Crabb's Lane in the afterglow of the enthusiasm which had kindled his imagination when he saw the remembered shapes of the Clees. This was the place, so long sought after but never yet found, after which his

heart hankered: the surgery so cunningly placed away from the house, yet connected with it by the covered passage; the neat little dispensary discreetly cut off from the rest by the deal partition; the consulting-room, airy, well-lighted, with everything to one's hand; the house itself, neither too large nor too small, precisely created for the use of a young married couple; the position of Sedgebury itself, on that healthy upland ridge where great winds out of Wales swept the smoke of North Bromwich and all her black peers north-eastward; the size and type of the practice, composed of working-class folk, whom, because of his own social origins, he could understand—yet of people who (as the doctor's widow informed him) had not yet been drilled into servility like the factory-slaves of North Bromwich, but worked for themselves and were proud of their independence—rough and ready, sturdy, difficult (so much the better!), but “tremendously loyal”; above all, the price of the practice—an obvious bargain—the agents had quoted five hundred: their client a hundred pounds less—which was well within the scope of his shallow pocket.

As he walked through the house, admiring, already possessive, he had been able to picture himself and Clara in every room of it; there was even an admirable maid (if their funds would run to one) already devoted to the place and waiting to be engaged. He had been convinced that Clara, as much as himself, would fall in love with it: it was within reach

of North Bromwich and such of her former associations as she wished to "keep up"—yet far enough away from North Bromwich to give them immunity from Jacob Medhurst's unwelcome attentions. Remote, yet by no means isolated; nor yet a dead end, but a vigorous little town, within the black country's orbit if not of it, reasonably prosperous, within modest limits, and, as the ledgers showed, steadily growing, with no black-coated suburbans to trouble a man with their bad debts and flimsy social pretensions: even the shopkeepers, as Mrs. Harbord had remarked, were working-class folk at heart, with no nonsense about them. If Clara and he could not make their own lives and find happiness in a place like Sedgebury, he was no judge of her or of himself.

And then, on the top of this triumphant determination, came the news that he could not buy the practice without the house. An unscrupulous man, he told himself, would not worry his head about that. He would soon find some other house and rent it and put up his plate, getting a start before Harbord's successor had found his feet and meeting him on equal terms. His heart sank as it struck him that, for all he knew, some other prospective purchaser, less scrupulous than himself, might already be considering the idea. Yet he knew that, however tempted, he could not do this. The memory of that brave lonely woman, who had opened her heart to him so freely, and the face of the dead man that had gazed at him from the mantelpiece

with those kind, honest eyes, would have overwhelmed him with shame.

On the way from Dulston, jolted through the murky dusk, he sat wrestling with incontrovertible figures. He believed he possessed, at that moment, six hundred pounds, though bank balances, unobserved, had an odd way of shrinking. Six hundred pounds—rather less than half what was needed apart from the expense of furnishing and of providing his wife with the most modest of trousseaux. He had no imaginable asset that he could pledge as security for a loan save his youth, his strength, his untested determination. Even if he hadn't quarrelled with Jacob Medhurst (or Medhurst with him) and had consented to serve a term of years, like the other Jacob, for the prospect of being permitted to marry Clara, he would still, at the end of them, have been hardly within reach of the thing he desired.

In his search for a possible solution his mind turned to the only rich man with whom he had ever been intimate, Martin Lacey. To the Laceys and people of their kind six hundred pounds, the price of his desire, would seem only a trifling sum. Lacey's father had probably paid twice as much as that for any one of the Pre-Raphaelite pictures with which the long corridor that led to his study was hung. Lacey himself, who thought little of money and affected to look down on it, would almost certainly have lent it him if he had dared to ask. But he knew he couldn't ask Lacey. It

wasn't so much a matter of daring as one of pride. Lacey had scorned the manner of life he proposed to adopt; he had scoffed at his devotion to Clara; he would despise him the more if he asked for the loan of money, even though he gave it him.

By the time he had reached North Bromwich he had decided to tell Clara nothing of his discovery until he had satisfied himself that there was no way of profiting by it. After a sleepless night in the cheap lodgings he had taken, he walked over to the hospital determined to consult his old chief Cartwright. There, for all Lacey's scorn of him, was a man of the world, a wise man, just and kindly.

Cartwright was operating, they told him, on a case of strangulated hernia just in from the country. As he approached the theatre John Bradley sniffed an unusual odour. Carbolic acid! Could he believe his nose? Yet carbolic acid it was. At the head of the table, above the anæsthetist's shoulders, the dresser stood grimly pumping at a Lister spray. Cartwright himself, perspiring freely and snorting into the open wound, was muttering inaudible profanities to himself as usual. When he heard John's step he turned and nodded and smiled at him, wiped his fingers on a blood-stained towel and held out his hand.

"Congratulations, Bradley," he said. "I've heard that you're through. It don't mean that you know any more than you did before; but you're licensed to kill, and that's a privilege worth having." He coughed and

spluttered. "This damned spray gets on my throat. You see I've come round to it? Don't think for a moment it means I believe in germs. But the fashion's caught on, and if you haven't pestified the whole theatre with carbolic people say, 'I told you so,' when your cases go wrong. A bad strangulation this. He came in too late, poor fellow. If it isn't gangrenous now, it will be to-morrow. It'll be a great comfort to his widow to know that he died in the odour of carbolic acid, if not of sanctity. What the hell do you think you're doing, sir?"

At that moment, in fact, the group round the operating-table—patient, surgeons, sisters, house-surgeon, anæsthetist—was suddenly deluged with squirts of liquid carbolic lotion.

"I'm afraid the spray's jammed again, sir," the dresser said.

"So it seems, Mr. Roberts," Cartwright replied sardonically. "Kindly take the damned thing away and stamp on it—or, better, present it to Mr. Borden with my compliments."

He swabbed the wound tenderly with the towel he held in his hands and went on with the operation. John Bradley was charmed all over again by the deftness and delicacy of those blunt fingers, though it gave him a corrective shock when he saw the surgeon select a bundle of sutures from the lapel of his operating-coat and hold them between his lips for greater convenience until he had closed the wound. Then he gave

the unconscious patient's abdomen a benevolent slap.

"There you are, my friend. That's all I can do for you!" he said. He turned to his house-surgeon: "Jones, if this poor devil complains of great pain when he comes round, tell the sister in Number Two to put on a nice comforting application. In cases of abdominal pain like this there's nothing to equal the good, old-fashioned bread-poultice. Do you know that some of these fellows are actually using dry dressings of gauze in these days, Bradley?" he said.

He went on grumbling to John about the follies of fashion as he washed his hands and stripped off his operating-coat. It was the same old coat, John noticed—a little shabbier, a little stiffer, considerably more foul. He stood in his shirt-sleeves, smiling benevolently.

"Well, what can I do for you, Bradley, my boy?" he said. "Do you want a house-surgeoncy? You can come on for me, and welcome, as soon as this fellow Jones has finished in a month's time. You're still with Medhurst?" He laughed. "That's a grand old ruffian. Simpson-Lyle and he! A case of *Arcades ambo*. Well, I suppose they enjoy their Arcadia. My own tastes are more Spartan."

John told him the story of the Boulton Crescent debacle. ^

"Well, I'm not altogether surprised at that," Cartwright admitted. "If the young woman's anything like her uncle . . ."

"She isn't, thank God!"

"Then what are your plans?"

John told him of his visit to Sedgebury: his desires, his difficulties.

Cartwright listened, walking to and fro, his hands locked beneath his flapping coat-tails.

"Walter Harbord . . . Yes, yes," he said. "I knew Harbord well, though I haven't seen him for years and had no idea he was gone. Poor fellow . . . Lobar pneumonia, you say? He was rather that type: these great, strapping short-necked chaps have a bad prognosis. And the widow's in difficulties? Yes, I remember her, too. A superior woman. A brave woman, too, I should say. But it makes one think, Bradley. It makes one think, doesn't it? Here's a fine conscientious man, the very best type of G.P., who's devoted the prime of his life—probably more of it than he could spare—to a working-class practice, and sweated his guts out day and night for nearly twenty years, attending folk half of whom, he knew perfectly well, wouldn't pay him—because they couldn't. Out he goes, in the middle of it, leaving a wife as good as himself and a couple of kids more or less on the rocks. That's not an uncommon story, my boy. That's General Practice. It's the lot of ninety per cent of the men who qualify, after spending anything up to a thousand pounds for the privilege of living the life of a galley-slave till they drop. Doctors' widows . . . You'll find them everywhere, all over the country,

keeping cheap boarding-houses, acting as house-keepers, matrons in schools. I know two at this moment, admirable women both, in domestic service. One hears a deal of sanctimonious talk about the virtue of our great profession, but the devils only talk like saints when the devils are sick. When they're well they assure you that virtue's its own reward. And they're just about right where General Practice is concerned. On the other hand, observe Mr. Simpson-Lyle. Well, Lyle doesn't pretend to be virtuous anyway; and the man's a born genius—you've got to grant him that in extenuation, though I'm damned if I see why you should. So Walter Harbord is dead. I'm sorry for that. He won't be an easy man to follow, Bradley, I give you fair warning. But you've made up your mind to have a go at it, and the practice, although it won't be a gold-mine, has taken your fancy. There's no opposition in Sedgebury. Harbord's practice is sound enough. All right; if you ask my advice, I say: 'Go ahead, and God bless you.'"

"I can't go ahead, sir. They won't sell the practice without the house."

"Then buy the house, my dear fellow."

"I haven't the money."

"Have you enough to buy the practice alone?"

"Oh, yes. I can do that comfortably."

"What do they want for the house?"

"Nine hundred pounds."

"That sounds reasonable. It can't be worth very

, much less. And it can't run away or collapse—there are no pits at Sedgebury. Borrow the money and buy it.”

“I've no security, sir.”

“No security? What are you talking about? Take out an insurance policy and raise money on the house and practice together. The whole of the North Bromwich district is swollen with money that people are waiting to invest in real estate. If I give you a letter to my lawyer, I'm prepared to bet that in less than a week he'll have found some costive retired manufacturer who will jump at the chance of giving you a mortgage at no more than four per cent. And he won't be doing you a favour either. The favour's on your side. You shall have your letter this afternoon. Now come round the wards with me. I've a compound fracture healing by first intention. That's a thing you've never seen before in your life and probably won't see again. Borden will tell you it's all because I used his damned spray; but we know better. Remember what Ambroise Paré said. *I dressed him: God cured him.* And I say: God only knows how.”

They walked into the ward. Antiseptics or none, the “good old surgical stink” was still predominant.

(v)

They were married, within a month, in the ugly, stuccoed church at the back of Boulton Crescent: that incongruous mixture of Gothic spire and pedimented portico, imprisoned, forlorn and blackened with smoke, within massive graveyard railings. The setting was not romantic. John Bradley remembered little of the ceremony. Inside, plaster flaked from the walls in leprous patches; the heavy air smelt stale as that of a vault. They walked down the aisle between high-walled varnished box-pews that had lain vacant for years, the seats piled with mouse-nibbled cushions and hassocks upholstered in red rep, and stacks of dusty psalters and prayer-books, the property of forgotten worshippers who had filled the church in the days when that part of North Bromwich had been still residential. Change and decay. . . . There was no sign of life in the empty building, save a single tortoise-shell butterfly that fluttered dryly, disconsolately, against the soot-bleared panes of one round-arched window. The parson seemed hardly more alive than his church: a sour-looking, small-featured man, in a creased and grubby surplice. He faltered over the words of the marriage-service: Janet Medhurst—the only witness apart from the vergers—disdainfully prompted him. It must have been a long time since he had conducted a wedding, for when he had stumbled through it and

they followed him into the vestry, having become, as it were by accident, man and wife, he produced, instead of the marriage-register, the book in which records of funerals were entered. His rheumy eyes gloated anxiously over the modest fee that John paid him. He shook them both by the hand and wished them good luck. They passed out of the church, feeling thankful that the ceremony was over. A four-wheeled cab, strewn with straw, was waiting outside to take John and Clara to the station, while Janet walked home. She embraced Clara passionately, saying good-bye. John saw with amazement that there were tears in her eyes; but when she turned from her sister to bid him farewell she was smiling scornfully in spite of them.

"Aren't you going to kiss your only bridesmaid, John?" she laughed, with her old, disdainful mockery.

He kissed her awkwardly. All his actions that day seemed confused and clumsy. He was surprised when she kissed him too and pressed his hand with a fierceness that seemed out of keeping with those languid fingers. Perhaps she was merely clutching his hand to steady her own emotion.

"Be kind to her, John," she whispered. "You don't know how good she is."

Then she laughed abruptly and left them, walking away with rapid steps, a tall figure in a close-fitting black dress, indescribably lonely and pathetic. The cabman opened the door and dusted the carriage-seat

with his handkerchief. The cab turned, jolting over the cobbles out of the square. It jogged on past Boulton Crescent, in front of the doctor's tall, grim house, past the window of the gilt Empire drawing-room where, at that moment, Jacob Medhurst lay snoring with a handkerchief over his bald head. John and Clara sat side by side, solemn and silent, holding hands and looking in front of them. Clara's hand was gloved in smooth kid, which made the contact formal and somehow unnatural—like everything else on this astonishing day; yet he noticed how small the hand was within the kid-glove compared with his own. The hand of a child, he told himself, and was swept by a wave of protective emotion that brought tears into his eyes. "Be kind to her? Good God!" he thought. "How could she ask me that?"—and his heart went out in a rapture of gratitude and adoration for this small and exquisite creature who, by some miracle, had consented to trust herself to him for the rest of their uncertain lives. His hand closed on hers, and a faint pressure answered him.

"My own sweet love," he said. She turned and gazed and smiled at him. It seemed to him that her pale face was the loveliest thing he had ever seen: so calm, so pure, so perfect, so childlike in its composure . . . and yet so strange. It came over him, with a feeling in which wonder and awe were mingled, that this woman, whose beauty made him tremble, was as much of a stranger to him to-day as when first he had

seen her and fallen in love with her. He knew she was good and gentle; he knew that he passionately desired her; he knew that she loved him; and yet who was she—what was she? What unfathomable thoughts, dreams, emotions, doubts, fears, might be hidden now, at this very moment, beneath the calmness of that exquisite mask which was her pale face? Was she wondering in silence, as he did now, at the mysterious chance, fate, whatever you will, which, out of the swarming millions of North Bromwich, had contrived to bring herself and him, lonely strangers and sojourners, together, to mingle their lives as two chemicals of unknown quality are compounded in the laboratory? Did she feel the same wonder and awe as himself? Was she moved by similar hopes, desires, aspirations? He could not tell; he supposed he would never know, and could never know, since the greater part of all thought can never be spoken. When she did break silence at last her words treated of things far removed from what he had imagined.

“Don’t you think, John,” she said, “you had better tell the man to drive rather more quickly? It would be dreadful, wouldn’t it, if we missed that train?”

Of their journey to Sedgebury he remembered nothing but the odd sensation of her soft, cool cheek as he kissed it through the stiff strands of her veil.

CHAPTER SEVEN

(I)

ALL these things, Dr. Bradley reflected, happened so long ago. People marvelled, and rightly enough, at the memories of the old, persuading one to flatter oneself, as was perhaps excusable, on the vividness with which far-off details of things seen and heard (to say nothing of things felt) were remembered. The fact of "keeping one's memory" encouraged one at first to feel one was not growing old. Later on one realized that it meant one *was* growing old, and nothing else. And this memory of old age, for all its piercing vividness, had a catch in it. It refused to obey one's will. One couldn't recall the things one wanted to, but only such freakish matters as came to the surface because some chance association of ideas had caught them and dragged them up. Even more often they rose of their own accord from the deep pools of memory: dead thoughts, slowly floating upward like the bodies of drowned men.

There was, in those memories of old age, no continuity.⁴ They were not thought-composed and shaped like the stories one read in books. They were pitted and frayed here and there, like a moth-eaten coat, full of broken threads and loose ends; and no torturing of

the mind, as one soon came to know, could make them whole again. In that tissue, compact of a whole life's experience, time was stretched so thin that its dimension no longer possessed the significance which one habitually attached to it. And why should it, after all? One was told, and one had to believe, that the most complicated of dreams, in which the sleeping mind made vast excursions in time and space—crossing oceans and continents, experiencing the changes of seasons—could be dreamt in the seconds that ticked away between one movement of the sleeper and the next. Even to-night, as he sat there warmly drowsing, recalling in backward-reaching thought more than a quarter of his life, the fingers of his watch, which he put anxiously to his ear to see if it had stopped, had not covered an hour, and the fire appeared to be burning as brightly as ever. It would be a pity, he thought, to waste that comfortable warmth while his mind was still wakeful. . . .

And, indeed, he reflected, though the order of memories would not submit to discipline and their texture was patchy, the process of recollection was a legitimate and pleasant indulgence—not only because it was one of the privileges of age to “live one's life over again,” thereby multiplying its richness, but also because, by some dispensation of providence, past pains and pleasures, however acute, could now be revived and reviewed with an equal insensibility, in a calm resembling that which is attained by a surf-boat which,

after riding gigantic surges, shoots forward smoothly and comes to rest in a glassy lagoon. Thus, in this dispassionate and hardly-won immunity, the room in which he now sat—the setting of the most harrowing as well as the most exalted moments of his long life—reminded him of these no more poignantly than of the afternoon of his first visit to Sedgebury, when the doctor's widow had tenderly turned her husband's photograph on the mantelpiece to catch the failing light. This room was old now, like himself; the very ghosts had forsaken it, or, if they still dwelt there, attenuated, no longer troubled its ether with their restlessness. Even ghosts, it seemed, grew old.

It was not, in fact, events (or even emotions) themselves that old age remembered so much as the essence, the atmosphere of emotions and events. He would have been hard put to it, for instance, to recall and record many things that had actually happened during the first few months of his married life at Sedgebury; yet the essence of that unique experience abode with him like the memory of a perfume. They had come there in mid-September, and the first flush of its loveliness must have outlasted winter—at Sedgebury a season of bitter cold and fierce winds—yet the perfume of that ecstatic period was an essence of spring: of soft airs and white-blossomed boughs and resurgent life; of surpassing, fugitive sweetness; of a youth that seemed immortal, of invincible hope.

He could, if he wished (yet why should he,

seeing that their essence contained and transcended them?) recall disconnected moments, or even scenes, in which Clara—always Clara—was the focal point. He could remember the communicable glow of her excitement when, passing from room to room, he first showed her the house; how she had knitted her brows with an entrancing seriousness over the problems of how they should place and make the best of the scanty furniture the hundred pounds he had left over for it would allow them to buy; how, taking such things for granted, he had wondered whether these meticulous decisions were so important and had teased her for her seriousness.

“You’re just like a child with a new doll’s-house to play with,” he told her. “You’ll spend your whole life arranging and re-arranging things, and when you come to the end of it you’ll find yourself just where you started.”

Yet, when it did come to an end, he was forced to admit that in matters of this kind he was more of a child than she. Her decisions surprised him by their definiteness. She knew just what she wanted, and why. In questions of sheer economy, whether in money or labour, her wisdom and prudence put him to shame. It wasn’t for nothing that, since she was in her teens, she had kept house for a parsimonious man like Jacob Medhurst. John had been careful enough, he had always imagined, himself, but her sense of the value of money abashed him.

"Anyone 'ld think we were millionaires by the way you talk, John," she told him reproachfully. "All this grand scheme of yours of keeping a maid! Five shillings a week doesn't sound much by itself; but have you any idea what it costs to feed them? Even Lizzie, that thin little shrimp at Boulton Crescent ate more than you did; and anyhow there's no work in a house of this size that I can't do myself, when once I've got the place clean—and we'll call in a charwoman for that. If you don't want to save the money for yourself, my dear, I can do with it quite well, thank you! Twelve pounds a year? Why, in eighteen months I shall be able to buy a piano with what we've saved . . ."

Like her uncle, she was always saving. She had a genuine Victorian bourgeois horror of debt (in itself, no doubt, admirable) which she pushed to a degree that John Bradley found ridiculous: if she had been to the village and forgotten her purse she would sooner tramp all the way home again to fetch it than buy a shilling's worth without paying cash. He tried to reason her out of this obstinate trait, to show her that even in matters of principle there was such a thing as a sense of proportion; but her reason, he soon discovered, was the part of her to which it was least profitable to appeal. If he wanted to get his way with her, he must rather call on her affections, her generosity, or on her sense of humour, which—though of a different quality from his own or from Janet's, who

was always ready to laugh at herself—surprised and delighted him by coming to his rescue in moments when he himself was inclined to take life too grimly.

On the whole he was forced to admit with admiration that she was stronger than he, not merely morally, but constitutionally. Her fibre was tougher and more resilient than his; her energy inexhaustible. At first it had shocked him, when he came home from his rounds, to find her sweeping his surgery, marooned in the midst of piles of heavy furniture. Those delicate hands, he felt, were not made to be so degraded. Yet beneath the delicacy of the small body he adored there existed a hard core of strength inherited, no doubt, from her yeoman forbears in Gloucestershire, sustained and nerved by a spiritual dower of a similar quality—the tradition of endless manual labour bred in the farmhouse, together with a passion for order and cleanliness.

“You’ll tire yourself out, my darling,” he said. “Can you never rest?” But she only laughed at him.

“You have your work, John,” she told him, “and I have mine. Do you think I don’t know far better than you what has to be done in a house? A fine thing it would be if people could say you’d a slovenly wife!” (That was another thing new to him: her instinctive stressing of the importance of what “people” said or thought.) “Besides, if I felt the least tired you might be perfectly sure I should stop and ‘rest’ as you call it. But I never feel tired up here. This air is

wonderful. I'm so well it makes me ashamed to think of poor Janet still breathing that dreadful atmosphere in the middle of North Bromwich. Don't forget that I'm country-born and bred like yourself, John. If we hadn't been brought to North Bromwich by Uncle Jacob, 'when father died, I should probably by this time have been a farmer's wife!"

"Thank heaven your uncle did bring you to North Bromwich!" he said.

The suggestion, even in jest, that she could ever possibly have been married to anyone but himself made him instantly jealous. It was true, as she said, that the Sedgbury air had filled her with radiant health. Though her body was frail and so light that when he kissed her he could pick her up like a child, her eyes shone with a new brightness; her delicate skin was transfused by the glow of the rich blood that flowed beneath it. Not only the upland air of Sedgbury, but also marriage suited her. She was not merely intensely alive, but a source of life.

The change had done even more than that. It had given release to qualities of a variety and richness which John Bradley had not suspected. He had fallen in love with her at first sight at Boulton Crescent because he was ripe for love and her physical type, the opposite of his own, attracted him. For a man of his age (and of his calling) he had been strangely innocent. In the awe and surprise of his own infatuation, the worship of what had seemed to him an exquisite

beauty, he had created for himself an image of her that had little in common with the reality: that of a creature made of a finer material than himself; one who, if not unattainable, was remote, exalted, pure as light, self-sufficient and self-secure in a more than mortal serenity—a divine integration of all his youth's ideals and desires. Though the aura of this divinity still clung to her, he found that she was not merely an abstraction, but a person. He discovered that she was a woman.

Until now, though his share of life had been varied enough, it had never included any intimate human relationship. The nearest thing to such intimacy had probably been his unequal friendship with Martin Lacey, in which his humble hero-worship had played so large a part. Yet, in spite of John Bradley's devotion and admiration, that intimacy had its limits, and "human" was hardly the word that could be applied to it. Less through Lacey's fault than his own, he had always been conscious of his inferiority in breeding and knowledge and culture: the white flame of his friend's scientific enthusiasm had burnt with a draught too fierce to permit the kindling of any gentler fires. Nor had he, before his marriage, had much acquaintance with women. The strain of wild shyness which, along with his lanky figure and black brows, he had inherited from his father had carried with it an instinctive distrust of them as symbols of the insidious chains of domesticity and as a threat to his birthright

of freedom in body and spirit. He had feared them before he knew for sure what there was to fear. Even his relationship with his mother, in early childhood accepted unquestioningly, had later been rudely destroyed. His mind still bore, though he did not know it, the scars of that severance; was still haunted and armed with wariness by the memory of that puzzled disappointment and disillusion.

Marriage cured him of these secret ills. Instead of the bondage from which he had shrunk, he found in it a release from bonds less tangible. For the first time in his life he was able to open his heart to another human being, in the certain knowledge that whatever he revealed—no matter how trivial or ignorant or foolish it might be—would be received with understanding and sympathy, if only because it was his and because she loved him. It was this all-embracing, unquestioning charity, with something of the maternal in it, that made him passionately grateful. He had found, it seemed, not merely a wife, but his first friend. A friend wise as well as loving. Though in such superficial acquirements as erudition she was a child compared with him, in the basic humanities and in the small things that made up the greater part of their lives, she had a store of wisdom, instinctive rather than acquired, more reliable than his. Though his intellect often disputed her judgments, he came to confess, in the end, that they were usually just.

She was of such contradicting variety. Because she

had talked less than Janet, he had always supposed her to be silent by nature—indeed, this shy quietness of hers, by contributing to her mystery, had particularly attracted him. He was always embarrassed and scared by vivacious women. Now, released from the repressions of a life in which, as she confessed, she had never been wholly natural, she chattered to him with an engaging freedom and innocence. She was no longer withdrawn, but open as the day, revealing herself with a lack of reserve, a candour which he himself found it hard to equal. He had supposed her cold: no woman could have been more ardent. He had imagined her the most virginal of living creatures, so bloomed with a natural modesty that the thought of offending her delicacy had filled him with apprehension. Yet here, again, he was bewildered to find that his decorous hesitations only surprised her. The mysteries of her body were as innocently open to him as those of her mind. She was his; she had given herself to him as a whole and there was an end of it. She accepted the fact and rejoiced in it with the utter unselfconsciousness of a child.

And yet, though it pleased them to think (and to speak) of themselves as children, they were in truth man and woman, and, for all their deliberate affectation of unity, distinct personalities and, comparative strangers. Even in those first halcyon days of rapture, there were moments when each became aware of this fact: in small conflicts of will and of taste and

of preconceived ideas requiring solution, adjustment; in misunderstandings of thought and word—even more of motive—which showed the hollowness of their pretty convention. Bemused by her beauty and its desirableness, John Bradley had not credited that small body with the spirited strength that lay beneath its graces. Convinced of her childlike simplicity, he had not guessed at the complications of a mind which, although it was less logical than his own, was in some ways subtler, in most stronger. There were lovers' quarrels over infinitesimal things; lost hours of alienation which, hopeless then, now seemed merely pitiful; reconciliations of a surpassing tenderness; renewals of love that seemed even more rapturous; renewals of hope.

April weather, indeed. Whenever he dreamed, as now, of that all-too-brief enchantment, it seemed as though time stood still in an atmosphere of eternal spring. It was always in the idyllic setting of that season that memory recalled her: sitting there in the little front room at the breakfast-table, so fresh and gay in her flower-sprigged overall, the morning sun beating in through the open window and bringing to life the golden threads in her hair; the joy of morning in her untroubled eyes. Or again; he saw her walking homeward beside him at evening along Crabb's Lane. The setting sun, on their left, cast diagonal shadows of their two moving figures on road and verge,² and he heard her laugh at the difference in size between their

shadows: Was he really so tall compared with her? She would not believe it; for, see, if she stood on tip-toe and he bent his head ever so little her lips could meet his. Had anyone seen her kiss him? It would never do for "people" to say Dr. Bradley had been seen from a distance kissing young women in the road! But of course nobody had seen them: at that hour of the evening, in those first lengthening twilights, all the nailers were busy tinkling away in their forges, making up for the time they had lost in the short winter days, and the hour of village lovers was later, when the only light in the fields—fields no longer, alas! for where Clara had picked her handful of cuckoo-flowers now rose the gaunt headgear and mountainous spoil-banks of the Sedgbury Main Colliery—was a mild luminosity of starshine reflected from heaped billows of may or the last pallid streak of light fading beyond the far line of the Clees. And again, most unforgettable of all, the memory of her moony whiteness when she first lay still beside him in the silence of a spring night with his brown arm beneath her. He had seen, with a doctor's eyes, the bodies of many women; for him nakedness of itself held no secret, disclosed no mystery. Yet even now, at the distance of half a century, he could remember how that miracle of beauty had dazzled him and made him catch his breath. Was there any other such perfection of shape in the world, he asked himself, such softness, such whiteness as hers? But she knew he was

gazing and worshipping, and turned to him—not out of shyness. Though he could not see the love in her darkened eyes, her hand touched his face and lay motionless, light as a fallen petal, claiming him as her own. So they closed their eyes and lay together and slept.

(II)

Yet life in the April Eden consisted of other things besides the adoration that sweetened it. The break in continuity had diminished the practice. The Sedgebury folk, as the doctor's widow had warned him, were suspicious of changes, and the loyalty they had given to Harbord did not extend to his successor: it was a commodity that could not be bought or sold. Certain basic sources of income, such as the parish appointment and those connected with "clubs" and Friendly Societies were handed over automatically—not so much because the new doctor was welcomed or approved of, as because, in the middle of the year, it was too much trouble to make a change.

But these, important as they were, made up less than half of the earnings on which John Bradley had counted. Private practice showed few signs of coming to his door. A large part of that on which Harbord had modestly flourished was diverted and greedily absorbed by the medical men in Mawne Heath, whose

faces and reputations at least were known. John found his opponents friendly enough when he called on them, and their wives, out of curiosity rather than friendliness, called on Clara; but competition was fierce in the Black Country towns, and, polite as they were, they made no secret of the fact that they were out to get what they could. Two partners, an Englishman named Wills and a Scotsman named Finlay, had already profited by the break and established a branch-surgery in Sedgebury High Street. John, tramping his round of club-patients, was distressed to see their smart dog-cart standing in front of the new brass plate and shawled women gossiping at the door as they waited their turns.

The most sinister sign of these defections was the lack of forward bookings for midwifery cases. The women of Sedgebury, in fact, were more conservative and suspicious than the men—not unreasonably, for childbirth, after all, was a more intimate matter than the setting of a fractured bone or the dressing of a wound—and the old harridans who acted as midwives and gave advice on the choice of a doctor knew nothing of Dr. Harbord's successor, except that he was unusually young, and more than likely, therefore, to be full of new ideas conflicting with the traditions of their trade. It would be better to wait and "see what he was like" before they engaged him; and not one of them felt inclined to make the experiment so long as the Mawne Heath doctors, who knew the ways of the

district, were prepared to turn out at night and drive three miles to attend a "case."

A death-vacancy, shorn of the benefit of an introduction, clearly had its disadvantages. It was not enough for the women, as John Bradley had innocently imagined, that an accoucheur should be married: it was also essential that he should be a "family man." Nor was it enough, it appeared, that the new doctor should have attended their husbands satisfactorily. Men were naturally taciturn; they took the club-doctor's attention for granted, as something for which they had paid their penny a week rather than as a subject for conversation. And it was talk, more than anything else, that established a doctor's repute.

Clara had made, though neither of them realized it, a cardinal error in declining to re-engage the Harbords' maid who was "attached to the place" and "slept out." The house at the corner of Halesby Road and Crabb's Lane was now an abode of mystery, sealed and cut off from the world of domestic gossip that surrounded it. There was no longer a garrulous purveyor of news to disclose to eager ears what went on inside it; what the new people were "like," how they lived, whether they were "near" or generous, and if they "got on well" together. Mr. Harbord's Emma, who had worked in the house for more than twelve years, had no sort of opinion of them anyway. Though she hadn't set foot in it, mind—and wouldn't now, no matter if they went down on their knees to her nor

What wages they offered to pay her—she knew for certain sure that the house wasn't kept in the way it used to be. You'd only to look at the surgery door-step, which had been raddled regular in her time once a week, to see for yourself that the new doctor's wife was no manager: a stuck-up little thing, walking arm-in-crook with her husband as bold as brass and neglecting that door-step! In a small, closed, isolated community, the unknown is inevitably under suspicion. Dr. Bradley and his wife might possibly turn out all right in time. For the present, Sedgebury regarded them as extremely odd people. All people who hadn't been born in Sedgebury or lived there for years were odd: that went without saying. As for the house: there was a rumour abroad, though heaven knew where it came from, unless the mortgagee had friends in Sedgebury, that there was a "monkey on the roof."

Meanwhile, the routine of morning and evening "surgery" kept John Bradley in his consulting-room for three hours every day: from nine to ten in the morning and from six to eight at night. He sat at his desk, not daring to leave his post, and waited with the concentration of a cat that watches a mouse-hole for the scrape of a private patient's feet in the waiting-room. Those who came—as, within a year or two he was to discover, and might have known earlier had he had the sense to examine their records in Dr. Harbord's ledgers—were most of them chronic debtors,

whose reputations were known and whom his Mawne Heath opponents would not have taken as a gift.

There were not many such in Sedgebury. The bulk of the nailers in those days, poor as they were, paid their bills when they could and felt it beneath the dignity of their independence to run up debts: it was only later on, when factories multiplied and the new pits were sunk and the place was swamped with rootless shifting labour, that the problem of bad debtors became serious. During his earlier months in Sedgebury John had many hours on his hands, and no consolation save the fact that this idleness allowed him time to spend with his wife and, for the first time in over two years, the privilege of unbroken sleep. Even so, when the quarter days came round with surprising swiftness and he made up his accounts, he was shocked to see how little money had come in and how little was left when he had paid his insurance premium and the interest on his loan, which together swallowed up all his private takings. There was no question yet, as he had gaily hoped there would be, of paying off any of the capital; and though there was no hurry about this, the thought of that unmovable burden of debt began to oppress him. Supposing that, like Harbord, he took pneumonia and died!

He worried the more because, during the last few months, his contingent responsibilities had been increased. Clara was due to have her first baby in the following February. It was, as he told himself,

ridiculous that a man of his experience should be frightened of that. He remembered the advice that Jacob Medhurst had given him: there were twenty-nine million nine hundred and seventy-four thousand people living in England and Wales; out of these, more than twenty-five million had been born without inconvenience to anyone but their mothers. But it was precisely his obstetric knowledge that made him apprehensive. What of the odd four million? His mind grew dark with forebodings of potential disaster to the person he loved best on earth—the only person he loved. And she, his sole confidant, was the one, above all others, with whom he obviously could not share his secret anxiety.

In her present condition it seemed more than ever important that she should not be troubled with his financial worries. The fact that she was going to have a child did not frighten her in the least. It made her happy and hopeful and proud; it even invested her with a new physical dignity. Her fingers were busy with sewing, her mind was full of plans for her own convenience, and his, when her time arrived. She found it hard to understand his mournful tenderness, the anxiety that clouded his face when he forgot to control it, at a time when they both had this great event to look forward to. There was only one thing, indeed, she missed at Sedgely—particularly now that, with the shortening days, she went about less and had hours of loneliness on her hands: her beloved music. John,

with all his love and his understanding, could hardly realize how much the loss of it meant to her. Her fingers were growing stiff, and she felt it tragic to lose the only accomplishment of which she was proud. One evening she asked him if they couldn't afford to buy a piano.

"It would make such a difference during the winter," she said, "and I'm sure, if we looked about we could find one, second-hand or even at a sale. I really don't think it need cost more than twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds?" At that moment she might just as well have asked for a thousand.

"Twenty pounds isn't very much, is it?" she said. "Are we really so short of money as all that? Haven't the payments from the clubs just come in?"

They had not merely come in: the greater part had gone out again. But that wouldn't satisfy her. Where had all the money gone to? She felt that she ought to know if only because she was convinced that she had a better head for figures than he. "Don't forget that I'm Uncle Jacob's niece," she reminded him.

So the secret of the mortgage was blurted out at last. Though he had determined never to let her know of it until the debt had been paid, the confession she forced from him gave him enormous relief. After all, this was the only thing in his life he had ever hidden from her.

"Nine hundred pounds . . . That sounds like a

dreadful burden," she said. "And to think that you let yourself in for that just for the sake of marrying me! You should have told me before you did a thing like that, darling."

"I suppose I should. I only loved you then: I didn't know you. You might have been frightened and changed your mind."

She shook her head. "Nothing would ever have made me do that. How much interest have we to pay?"

"Five per cent. That makes forty-five pounds a year. The insurance premium which I have to pay next month means twenty-one pounds more. Sixty-five altogether. I'd hoped to start paying off the capital as well by the end of the year; but so little money has come in—far less than I had expected."

"You mean that the practice is not as good as they said it was?"

"No, no. It's not that. I'm sure the practice is all right. Only people don't know me yet; they haven't got used to me. I'm afraid they think of me as young and inexperienced."

"Mrs. Martyn, at Silver Street, asked me how old you were only the other day. You do look dreadfully young, Johnny. She told me you ought to grow a beard."

"And look like a tramp for a month!"

"What on earth does that matter? The conceit of the man! Heaven knows I'm beginning to look like nothing on earth myself. I think Mrs. Martyn was

right. I shall hide your razor. It will serve you right for having kept all this from me. You've been worrying about it, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have been worrying a bit."

"I knew there was something wrong. I thought you were worrying about me."

"One's a little anxious, naturally. You're so precious to me."

"My sweet! And you a doctor! That was naughty of you. I'm a perfectly healthy young woman and I never felt better in my life. You've no business to be worrying about me, or the money either. Is the practice worth any less now than it was before?"

"Just a little, probably. I bought it very cheap."

"Is the house worth less?"

"No. I'm sure I paid less than it's worth."

"Then what are you worrying about? If the worst came to the worst, which it won't, and we found that we couldn't manage to pay our way, what on earth would it matter? We could sell the house and the practice and start all over again. I'm not afraid, Johnny."

"My darling—of course I know you're quite right. You've twice as much pluck as I have. I'd allowed things to get a bit on the top of me."

"And why? Just because you were trying to keep them from me, you foolish child! Promise me faithfully now that you'll never do that again. I've a right to take my share, and I want to take it. Remember

that. And, what's more, you're going to start growing that beard to-morrow. I think it'll improve you, and it may change our luck."

And, strangely enough, the luck did change for the better before the new beard, which made him look so ridiculously like his father, was grown. In the middle of a bitter November night he was summoned to his first midwifery case. It was not his by rights. The Mawne Heath partners, Findlay and Wills, had been engaged for it; but Wills was in bed with bronchitis when it "came on," and Findlay was out at another. Things were not going well and the nurse, the best of the Sedgebury midwives (though that didn't mean much) had grown frightened. The husband, a dour, thickset young nailer named Lijah Hodgetts, came hammering at the front-door in the small hours.

"Yo'm to come at onst," he said. "The missus is bad. It's her first, and Mrs. Weaver don't like the look on her."

"Was no doctor engaged for her?"

"Ah, them Mawne Heath chaps was booked; but one on 'em's ill, and 'tother one cau' be found. I'm to see that you come at onst, her says, and bring you back along of me." ©

The night was pitch dark, with flurries of snow; the roads iron-bound; thin ice crinkled under their feet. The man was brusque and taciturn. John asked him if he were one of his club-patients.

"No, I never had no truck with them clubs," he answered scornfully. "I reckon to pay as I go, and there's plenty of brass in the stocking if that's what yo'm after."

He hurried John to a cottage that stood back from the road with a nail-house attached to it.

"Go right on up," he said roughly. "If yo' want anything fetched, yo've only got to holler me."

The room upstairs was crowded, as usual, with women engrossed in the patient's sufferings. Their looks, as he entered, were unfriendly and sceptical if not hostile. Mrs. Weaver, the midwife, a stumpy middle-aged woman with a pock-marked face, was hardly more encouraging.

"I reckon there's summat amiss," she said. "Be-happen yo' may be able to put it to rights or say what us ought to do afore Findlay comes. *He*'ld know what to do soon enough, Findlay would, but they cau' get hold on him."

John Bradley examined the patient. She was a small woman, as thickset and tough as her husband. Her sturdy, graceless body looked as if it were made for the bearing of children, full of courage and strength. But now neither strength nor courage availed her. The child was mis-placed: a transverse presentation. She might set her teeth and struggle on till her heart was broken without any release.

"A cross-birth," he told the midwife. "It's a pity you didn't send for someone before."—How many

times in his life was he to utter those wretched words! —“I shall have to turn.”

Mrs. Weaver grew alarmed. “Hadn’t us better wait until the doctor turns up afore interfering?”

John Bradley turned on her angrily: “Interfering? What do you mean? I am a doctor. Didn’t you send for me? There’s been too much time wasted already.”

“No offence intended. I only meant to say that seeing as . . .”

“Oh, hold your hush, Mrs. Weaver,” the patient cried. “I’ve had more than enough of it, and if this young doctor can help me . . .”

“I’ll help you all right, Mrs. Hodgetts,” John said. “Have no fear of that!”

The job was not easy, but he had done it before and knew what he was about. He worked for ten minutes, correcting the presentation. He rose to his feet in triumph. Now all should be well.

But all was not well, as he presently saw. The birth made no progress. The women at the foot of the bed were murmuring and shaking their heads. The midwife, though she said nothing, evidently distrusted him, and the patient’s strength was failing.

“I shall have to help her,” he said. “Get me plenty of boiling water.”

“There’s two kettles boiling on the hob,” Mrs. Weaver said grudgingly. “If you’ll holler downstairs for Lijah, Mrs. Tildesley, he’ll bring them up quick enough.” (Mrs. Tildesley hollered shrilly.) “But,

mind you, Dr. Bradley," she said, "I don't hold with using instruments. No more does Dr. Findlay. And Dr. Harbord, I've heard him say, with these very ears . . ."

John stopped her. The patient had turned her head and was listening anxiously. "I don't want to hear what Dr. Harbord told you," he said roughly. "He wasn't attending this case, and I am."

He disinfected his forceps. As he took them out of the bag he remembered the Professor of Midwifery's word: that "*Thou shalt do no murder*" should be stamped on every pair of them. He had never had to use them before; and it struck him as a crowning injustice that he should be forced to use them for the first time on another man's case. But tonight his choice lay between certain death on one side and possible murder on the other. He had made his decision. It was part, the gravest part, of a doctor's judicial responsibility to make such decisions, balancing life and death, and, once made, to carry them through without hesitation. That night, for the first of many times in his life, he gave thanks to the man whose mechanical genius had invented midwifery forceps, ensuring, through carefully-calculated curves, the precise axis of traction that enabled them to perform their function without bruising or breaking the most vulnerable tissues. And in three minutes all was over. The child was born, unharmed, and crying lustily.

"A nasty case, Bradley," Findlay said patronizingly,

when they met in the High Street next morning. "Thank you for looking after it. I'm not quarrelling with my luck that I happened to be out at another. To tell you the truth, I loathe midwifery. When you get to my age you'll like your own bed more and more on a winter night. The message never reached me until I got home for breakfast. Oh ay, the lassie is doing well enough—you can't kill these Sedgebury folk, you know; they're as tough as Scotswomen—and the bairn looks all right forbye. I'll say you're a good hand at the forceps, though I hate the damn tongs myself, and always did. How's your wife, by the way?"

Findlay mounted his trap and drove off without offering to divide the fee. Hitherto he had always been polite and friendly, and careful not to transgress professional etiquette; but that did not mean he was giving anything away; he had wedged his foot in the open door at Sedgebury and meant to keep it there as long as he could. There was talk already of new tube-works and chain-factories being built there, and his patient Walter Willis had tipped him the wink that The Great Mawne Iron and Steel Company, whose pits were exhausted, were prospecting for coal on the east of the ridge. As long as there seemed to be any chance of the place expanding Wills and he had determined to keep the branch-surgery going in Sedgebury. If the village did grow, they could easily put in an assistant to run it. This fellow Bradley appeared to be a decent lad, but not so formidable an opponent as

Harbord had been. Too young to be trusted in single-handed practice.

Two days later, the man Lijah Hodgetts presented himself at John's evening surgery.

"I've come to pay you for what you done for my missus, gaffer," he said.

John told him he had merely been acting for Dr. Findlay.

"Findlay be jiggered. I reckon the beggar that done the job ought to get the brass, and yo' done that job champion. Mrs. Weaver, her says as Harbord hisself couldn't 'ave done it neater. I've brought you the money, and I bain't going to take it back again, so yo'd best pick it up."

John firmly refused the half-sovereign he had planked on the desk. He explained, as well as he could, the ethical position, but not to Elijah Hodgett's satisfaction.

"Well, fools born mun be reared," he said at last, pocketing the coin contemptuously. "There bain't no call for me to meddle or mak in yo'r affairs, but I'll be dyed if that don't get over me. I don't reckon my missus and kid be Findlay's property any more nor Wills's. If either on 'em thinks they be, let 'em look out next time—that's all I say."

"Next time" came within less than a month. A small child arrived and tapped on the front door at breakfast-time—nobody, old or young, in Sedgebury, dreamt of using the bell whose brass knob Clara polished so

brightly—and handed in a note signed by “Mrs. Weaver” requesting “Dr. Bradley” to call during the morning round on Mrs. Hodgetts’s baby which had got the croup. Mrs. Weaver, the little girl added, said as there wasn’t no hurry. John thought differently; for “the croup,” as he knew by experience, was a loose term that covered the whole family of respiratory diseases from broncho-pneumonia to diphtheria; but the Hodgetts, strictly speaking, were still Findlay’s patients, and he could not properly attend them without letting Findlay know. When Findlay’s branch-surgery opened at ten o’clock, John took him the note and showed it him.

“Well, what are you proposing to do?” Findlay asked.

“With your permission I propose to visit the child this morning. I gather they’ve always been Harbord’s patients.”

Findlay grunted. “Permission be damned, Bradley. You evidently made good use of your opportunity of impressing the midwife. It’s old Weaver who’s made them send for you. If you think you’ve a right to do so, go and see the child by all means—and much good may it do you! But remember this: there’s no trick in the world these damned Sedgebury folk aren’t up to. Harbord’s patients a year ago, mine yesterday, yours to-day! That shows what they’re worth. All I advise you to do is to see that you get your money. Wife still keeping fit? When is it? Ah, yes, the last week

in February. I've got it down in my diary. I shall be there."

The Hodgetts baby's "croup" turned out to be less serious than it might have been: a slight touch of bronchitis which quickly yielded to treatment. Mrs. Weaver was there in charge: a very different Weaver from the hostile, forbidding woman who had eyed him so suspiciously on the night of the confinement. It was clear to John Bradley that she approved of him and trusted him in spite of his youth and was now prepared to regard him as Harbord's legitimate successor.

"I've two other confinements due next month, doctor," she said, "and I've told them they ought for to have you. I'll come round to the surgery this evening and tell you for certain when they're expecting."

The Hodgetts case marked the turn of the tide. It was as though the whole female population of Sedgebury had been waiting to see how the new doctor would behave in an emergency before they made up their minds as to whether he should be trusted. Nature came to his aid in the guise of a hard November with swift alternations of frost and drenching rain. By the end of the month all Sedgebury was coughing and sneezing; providential epidemics of mumps and measles began. John was busy walking on his rounds from dawn to dark; his "surgeries" were crowded. As the sight of the tall, bearded figure became familiar, folk who used to eye him suspiciously in the streets

began to give him good-day; the tradesmen went out of their way to salute him, and flattered Clara with their obligingness; the proceeds of the Michaelmas bills, the harvest of six months' work, began to roll in; by Christmas he found himself standing so well that he determined to give Clara a surprise by buying for her, as a New Year's gift, the piano she coveted.

Her joy was a rich reward.

"Oh, Johnny," she said, "it was sweet of you; but are you sure we can really afford it?"

"It didn't cost much," he told her—though it had cost a great deal—"I only hope it's all right. I know nothing about such things, but the man in the shop said the action—whatever that is—was new, and promised to keep it tuned for the first year free of charge. I should have let you choose it yourself, but I wanted it to be a surprise."

"It's the loveliest surprise," she said, "and, of course, it's perfect. I shall get Janet to pack up my music and send it by train to Dulston. I shall never be lonely again after this. I don't really deserve it, you know. Why are you so good to me, Johnny?"

"Because I love you. All I want is to know that you're happy."

"I shall always be happy so long as you love me—and so long as you're happy too, my darling," she said.

(III)

One thing only clouded for him the perfect serenity of that first winter: the thought of her approaching ordeal. He was thankful for the gruelling toil of those months—less because he was earning the money they needed so badly than because work distracted him. On the new calendar that stood on his desk the appointed day was marked with red ink. Whenever he sat down before it the ringed figure caught his eye like a danger signal. Though he knew it was important to hide his anxiety, he couldn't help watching her stealthily with professional eyes.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" she said. "Is my hair out of place? Is anything wrong?"

"No, no . . . I was thinking about something else," he told her.

He was thinking of nothing else. It was the worst of misfortunes, he told himself, to be a doctor; to be compelled, automatically and against his own will, to find himself searching perpetually, beneath the appearance of health (and her health was still radiant) for the first fine premonitions of possible ill: the least fluctuations of colour, variations of mood, changing tones of voice.

"No wonder you stare at me," she said. "I'm a positive fright. But I do wish you wouldn't. It isn't flattering. And please don't look so melancholy,

darling. I've told you, I'm perfectly all right."

Even though that were true, as his reason assured him, there were so many complications, happily ignored by a layman, which, when her time came, might threaten her with disaster. The thought of them haunted his imagination as he lay by her side at night. He wondered if Findlay was really competent to deal with them, asked himself if it wouldn't have been wiser to entrust her to a younger man—though indeed, in the craft of obstetrics, experience counted for much and principles of practice did not change. As he sat at his desk, trying to concentrate on his patients, the black line of crossed-off figures approached the red ring. He wished to God that time would pass more quickly.

The red-ringed date came, and passed, and a long night followed it.

Next morning he left on his round reluctantly. He knew he was scamping his cases. That couldn't be helped. When he arrived home for luncheon she welcomed him, kissing him as usual. Though he watched her narrowly there was no sign of any change in her; but when the meal was over, she said to him, with a controlled, unnatural quietness:

"I think you had better send for the nurse and Dr. Findlay, Johnny."

By three o'clock Findlay's dog-cart was at the door and Findlay himself bustling in: "Well, Bradley, we weren't far out. A punctual young woman! Have you

put her to bed? I'll go up and have a keek at her and see that everything's all right. I've an enormous round to-day and not half of it done, but there'll be no need for me yet awhile, I'm thinking."

John waited below. Findlay's manner was far too casual for his liking. Was it possible that this scrubby, dour little Scotsman, with his pale blue eyes and sandy eyebrows, could realize the importance of the occasion he treated so perfunctorily? Did the man know his business? He had never liked or trusted Findlay less. He doubted, to-day, if he could trust anyone—and least of all himself. Findlay was cracking his pawky lowlander's jokes. He was still laughing at his own wit when he came downstairs.

"Everything's first-rate," he said, "but the lassie has a long way to go. I shall be back from my round about six, and I'll look in again before I turn in. Man, it's a comforting thing to have a colleague about the house and to know that I'm not going to be worried out of my life unnecessarily by some nairvous young fool of a husband. My word, the wind's shrewd to-day!"

John went out and finished his round and returned after dark. The nurse reported slow progress, but nothing urgent. In an uneasy dream he found himself dispensing medicines and listening to the trivial confidences of patients whose ills did not interest him. His mind was upstairs with Clara. As soon as he appeared in the bedroom doorway she put on a brave

face and a smile to greet him; but her lank hair, her haggard, blotched face told another story. He could see she was anxious that he should not witness her suffering.

"Go downstairs and eat your supper," she said. "It's all ready for you in the larder."

He laid the table and sat down to eat. He found it infinitely pathetic that before she went upstairs she should have taken the trouble to prepare his evening meal for him. But he could not eat. He mixed himself, instead, a stiff glass of whisky and water. He loathed the stuff; but he must find courage somewhere. He sat miserably listless in front of the fire, trying to read the paper; but the words he read made no impression on his mind. His ears were strained, all the time, to catch any significant sounds in the room upstairs. He heard little enough. The silence was welcome. The silence was sinister, terrifying. An urgent knock on the front door startled him out of his dread.

"Mrs. Weaver says Mrs. Harper's took bad—Noar Harper's, Spring Cottages—and yo'm to come at onst."

He took his black bag and went out. Findlay had promised to look in again before he turned in. If anything happened before he came the charwoman, who had come in for the night, would summon him. Perhaps, by the time Mrs. Weaver's case was finished, all would be over. Thank heaven he could be useful

somewhere: he was certainly of no use here.

When he returned at midnight, hurrying towards the light in the bedroom window, Findlay's trap stood in front of the door. He groped his way through the dark sitting-room—the fire had gone out—and mounted the familiar stairs. The nurse appeared forbiddingly in the bedroom doorway.

"Well?" he whispered.

"Not yet. . . . But it won't be long now, doctor says, and everything's all right. Much better stay downstairs, Dr. Bradley. The minute it's over I'll let you know."

Her manner was firm, almost patronizing. She treated him as if he were a child. He had lost the divinity with which a doctor is hedged in a nurse's eyes and become merely a patient's husband. He submitted surprisingly and went downstairs and sat in the dark. The fireless living-room oppressed him. He felt the need of air and of motion. He went into Crabb's Lane, picking up, for no earthly reason, the bag he had just brought home. He walked beyond the last of the nailers' cottages and on to the narrowest part of the ridge: the point from which, nearly a year ago, he had first seen the Clees. Underfoot, the roadway was friable with frozen ruts: above in a still, clear sky shone myriads of frosty stars which seemed nearer to earth and more brilliant than usual, yet more dispassionate. To westward stretched a great void, in which neither a glimmer of light nor the vaguest of

forms could be seen: the dark undulations of sere fields and sapless woodlands rolling away to the valley of Severn, the Forest of Werewood, the border hills. But to eastward, beneath the stationary pall of smoke that hung in the upper air and veiled the true stars, the basin of the Black Country lay like a low sky set with its own constellations: coruscations of colliery spoil-heaps that smouldered invisibly by day but now twinkled brightly; brick-yard ovens and lime-kilns whose banked fires burned dull-red with a steadier, planetary glow; tailed comets of flaming vapour that suddenly flared from the throats of blast-furnaces and were spent; moving lights of goods-trains that slid dreamily like meteorites through the empty spaces which separated the dense nebulae that marked the street-lights of small towns such as Dulston, Wednesford and Wolverbury; far away, on the northern horizon, the greater galaxy of North Bromwich itself.

This fire-spangled darkness of earth was as silent as that of the sky and even more mournful. On that night he had taste for neither of these immensities, for each seemed to emphasize the littleness of human life and its impotence. As he turned away from them, there came into his mind the memory of a night, long ago, when he had set out from the Prince's Hospital to attend his first midwifery case and of the "nairvous" young husband of Mrs. Hollies whom he had carelessly passed in the Red Barn Road kitchen. He was filled with remorse to think how many times since that

night he had treated the nervousness of his patients' husbands jokingly, or even roughly. Now the tables were turned. He himself was as nervous and foolish and jumpy as any of them. No wonder, he thought, folk complained that doctors were callous! Now that he had tasted this medicine himself he would be more charitable. And yet, as he came to examine the matter more deeply (he was glad to find any train of thought that his distracted mind might follow) he saw that the so-called callousness of the doctor's mind had a justification; for nothing, after all, was more infectious than nervousness. It was the doctor's first duty to give the anxious confidence, and callousness—if that were the word—was part of his armoury. He had been wrong to resent Findlay's casual, off-hand manner. He should be thankful that Findlay was not racked at this moment by the terror that gripped himself. For Findlay, he realized, Clara was not an object of sentiment. She was not even the wife of a colleague, but simply a case which presented a problem that should be handled coldly, impersonally, to the best of his skill and knowledge: a piece of human mechanism and nothing more.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was long past midnight. He was dog-tired and mortally cold. He walked rapidly back to the house. There was a light in the living-room. Why. . . ? The least change seemed sinister. Findlay stood in front of the dead fire sipping a saucer of scalding tea that the

charwoman had made him. He glanced at John Bradley's haggard face and then at his bag.

"What? Another case?" he said. "The birth-rate's booming to-night and no mistake. I wondered what the devil had happened to you."

"How is she?"

"As calm and cool as a cucumber. Pulse seventy-eight," Findlay said laconically. "Yon's a grand little woman, Bradley, and I'm ready to bet the boy weighs nine pounds."

"The boy? Then it's over?"

"Born an hour ago, laddie. You'd best go and see them. But leave that damned bag downstairs, man, or you'll make the poor lassie think she's going to have twins."

That was in the Golden Jubilee year. They saw the little old Queen in her widow's bonnet drive down Corporation Street, in a carriage drawn by Windsor greys with outriders. A fanfare of silver trumpets sounded as the ribbon was cut. At night the hills were on fire, Sir Joseph Hingston's bonfire on Pen Beacon, as became his importance, outshining the rest.

"It's a pity," Clara said, "that baby won't remember this."

CHAPTER EIGHT

(1)

A good chap, little Alec Findlay, Dr. Bradley reflected. He could see him now, standing there in front of the fireplace, blowing his saucer of tea to cool it and squinting at him half-humorously with his pale blue eyes. A tough opponent, but strictly scrupulous. He had been genuinely sorry when Findlay retired a few years later, turning his back on England and taking his savings with him to some grey little seaside resort on the Clyde which, no doubt, was his private idea of heaven or one step nearer to it. There was a lot more dignity in the profession in those days, Dr. Bradley thought, than in these, when the medical schools turned out hungry young men, every one of them eager to tear his neighbours to pieces and scrambling for the bodies of each others' patients like shoals of sharks, trying to catch their victims with all sorts of chromium-plated trinkets—cardiographs, sphygmographs, radiant heat installations, ultra-violet rays, ionization, diathermy and Lord knows what—turning their consulting-rooms into electrical or mechanical laboratories until they looked like the projecting-rooms of cinemas, competing with one another in the glitter and speed of motor-cars, bought on the hire-

purchase system; the slaves of machines, not their masters (if only they knew it); forgetting the use of their legs—to say nothing of their hands and their eyes; complaining, like injured children, when their machines let them down; a hard-eyed generation, self-seeking, rapacious, schooled in a cut-throat age, yet morally soft—softer, certainly, in that respect, than his own contemporaries in general practice, men like Findlay and Wills.

Perhaps, after all, he was over-critical. Perhaps, he reflected, his attitude towards the new generation was still tinged by the uncomfortable conversation about book-debts he had had a few hours ago with the sleekly efficient young man who was buying his practice. No doubt, in these days, the profession was over-crowded; no doubt the standard of living was higher: it was more important that doctors should seem gentlemanly than that they should be gentlemen.

Yet, all said and done, he doubted if competition was any keener now than in the days when he fought for Sedgebury patients with Findlay and Wills. The conditions in which they fought reflected the difference between medieval warfare, when generals (like the Red Knight) "observed the rules of battle" and the wars of to-day, complicated by propaganda and poison-gas. Indeed, when once the first clash was over and each side had tested and come to respect the other's metal, the contest was decorous; and within a few years of his settling in Sedgebury its acuteness diminished.

there was work enough, and more than enough, to keep all three men busy without worrying about one another.

For Sedgebury, after more than three centuries of arrested development, began to grow, not through any inherent strength of its own but by the infusion of money and energy from its neighbours. As the moribund nailing industry shrivelled and died, trades more vigorous invaded the areas it had occupied. Land was cheap and sites fit for works were available; the nailers, skilled workmen after their fashion and used to the handling of metals, were impoverished and not greedy of wages. The Black Country, awakening from the stupor into which the exhaustion of its thick seams of coal and the slump in the heavy industries had thrown it, was launched on a new attempt to achieve prosperity, through its own stubborn will and the adaptability of its inhabitants, by manufacturing finished articles rather than providing their raw materials. Trade was booming throughout the district. The great iron masters—the Hingstons of Wolverbury (now blossoming into baronetcy), the Willises of Mawne, the Hacketts of Haysech—were switching their shrewd intelligences and their fortunes from iron into steel. The hordes of small manufacturers took courage from them. There was no shape of metal, from the forged shaft of a liner or battleship and its anchor-chains to tubes of all calibres, buckets, spades, galvanized sheeting, saucepans and dog-leads, that in their

mushroom factories they were not ready to make and eager to sell. So the smoke-pall grew wider and heavier month by month; to its ancient sulphurous acidity there were added strange new odours of acid galvanic mediums and soldering fluxes. The sluggish waters of the Stour which skirted Mawne Heath became turbid and foul with oily and chemical effluents. There had been trout in the Stour when John Bradley first came to Sedgebury; now the polluted stream flowed as barren of life as the cinder-y banks that contained it. From Mawne Heath, from Dulston, the creeping line of brick, fading quickly from garish red to sooty, advanced on the Sedgebury ridge and began to climb it. Like a growing cancer the cells of this new growth invaded the village's weakened tissues until the new was greater than the old. First, its northern and eastern flanks were invaded; next its centre—the Church Square, the Bull Ring, the High Street—was enveloped, encysted; then the greedy tentacles reached out to the south and the west, blackening the poor fields that crowned the back of the ridge. The chief, having crossed the Halesby Road and pushed its way down Crabb's Lane, obliterating or absorbing, as it passed, the row of nailers' cottages that faced John Bradley's surgery, attained at length the crest from which, on his first visit to Sedgebury, he had seen the Clees, and there, as though daunted by the sublimity of the spectacle, halted, abruptly, to stand arrested, like the edge of a cooling lava-flow.

The upland air was less sweet in Sedgebury now. Not even the soft winds out of Wales or the keener blasts that leapt over the Clees could whirl away the smoke that rose from its factory-chimneys. On still summer afternoons the liquid trilling of larks still filtered down through the grey veil that made them invisible; but the throstles and blackbirds that used to call from the cottage garden-hedges when hawthorn leaf-buds were still tipped with crimson no longer carried John Bradley's waking mind back to his boyhood in Lesswardine. What woke him now was the melancholy hoot of the steam siren (or "bull," as they called it) in Aaron Sanders's perambulator and go-cart works, whose new buildings and tapered smoke-stack, together with the terra-cotta villa in which their owner chose to live and "keep an eye on them," had sprung up with alarming speed on the site of the Crabb's Lane nailers' cottages.

"Beautiful situation you've got up here, doctor," Mr. Sanders said. "I reckon my workmen 'll be a sight healthier here than they was down in Halesby. It's remarkable what a lot of time a works like mine loses through trivial ill 'ealth; and by gum this air don't 'alf give you an appetite. Since I've come up 'ere I've ate my poor missus out of 'earth and 'ome. Lovely view too we've got from them back bedroom winders. You look right over to the 'ills."

John Bradley did not mention—as Clara said she most certainly would have done—that the view from

Mr. Sanders's back bedroom had once been his own. Now, if they wanted to see his hills, they had to walk for a good half-mile down Crabb's Lane—more rutted than ever by the wheels of builders' wagons. They would still make that pilgrimage sometimes on a spring evening, though rarely in those days, for he seldom got back from his round before it was dark. Clara would push the baby out (his name was Matthew) in the superb bassinet, Jubilee Model, which Mr. Sanders had diffidently insisted on giving her—not as a peace-offering for the destruction of their view but out of the kindness of a heart of gold, the profusion of his new-gotten wealth, and a conviction that the walking advertisement made it worth while.

"Every woman notices the doctor's wife," he said, "and no woman with a baby can see one of our prams without wanting to save up and get one. Besides, your wife is a pretty woman, doctor," he added with a wink, "and I never pretend I don't like pretty women. You ask my missus! When the nipper's shortened and can sit up, I'll send you one of our go-carts. How's business? You seem to be buzzing round a good bit."

He was "buzzing round" from morning till night—not merely because the population and birth-rate of Sedgbury were increasing so rapidly but because money was circulating and "a bottle of medicine" now and then and a chat with the doctor (to say nothing of a series of chats in the waiting-room) is one of the

working-class woman's minor luxuries. The membership of his "clubs" was increasing too. In his third year at Sedgebury the steady income from these—his "bread and butter money" as he called it—brought in more than the whole of his practice had earned in the first. Prosperity reflected itself in other ways. More patients paid cash, and a number of debts which he had written off as bad were surprisingly paid. He could laugh at himself now when he thought of the day he had suffered such grievous heart-searchings over the cost of Clara's piano. He had begun to pay off the capital of his mortgage. The house would soon be his own, and the house, as well as the practice, had risen in value.

There was no need any more for Clara to "deny herself anything"—though he had to confess to himself that the amount of money she spent on her clothes and little Matthew's—which was modest enough in fact—seemed shocking to him, who had never bought more than one suit in two years. After all, as Aaron Sanders suggested, smart clothes were something of an advertisement. Everyone noticed a doctor's wife. Her appearance was a symbol of prosperity. And nothing succeeds like success. He had even been tempted, in the first flush of his good fortune, to launch out, in emulation of Findlay, into a horse and trap. Not only his shyness of all display but also his hard common sense prevented his doing this. Though the practice was growing large, its area was still con-

concentrated and could actually be covered more easily by a man on his feet. More than that, his health benefited by the exercise of walking, on an average, at least seven miles a day, though in spite of this, Clara told him, he was growing fat. If he were, it was largely her fault. She had not humoured Jacob Medhurst's gluttonous paunch for six years without learning what tickled male palates.

He was not really growing fat, as he explained rather sorely; but he was, in fact, very different physically from the lanky, loose-limbed young man whom she had watched from behind the lace curtains as he stood on her uncle's doorstep. He had "filled out," his big frame had reached the limit of its growth, his muscles were set and taut. He was a bigger and a more powerful man than his father, whom, now that he had grown his black beard, he recognized himself as resembling.

Considering what he had looked like in those days, comparing the splendour of that mature robustness with himself as he was to-day, an old man, bent and frail, Dr. Bradley remembered the photograph of a family group—himself, Clara, and the child—which he had glanced at as he packed it away with his books the other night. It was the only one in the ribbon-tied bundle that portrayed him: he had always disliked being photographed, though this was one of Clara's darling extravagances.

He remembered the day when they had gone into North Bromwich by train for this particular ordeal. (Clara went in to "town" every month to do shopping and have tea with Janet at Battye's confectioner's shop in the new Corporation Street, and bring back the news of her sister's latest troubles, and Uncle Jacob's vagaries.) He remembered it well because Matthew had been train-sick and damaged his purple plush trousers; because Clara had nearly wept over this and been furious with him when he laughed. They had trudged wearily up the Halesby Road to Whitecote's the photographer's, and his Sunday frock-coat, which was growing too tight for his shoulders, had nearly suffocated him. Then a little man with fuzzy black hair had fixed the pose—John Bradley standing superb, with one elbow bent on a mock marble column, and Clara sitting beside him, with Matthew, his left trouser-leg cunningly concealed, on her lap. Both their heads had been fixed from behind in iron clamps (for exposures were lengthy in those days) and when, their eyes glazed with concentration, they had been commanded to "smale, please" (with a result of angelic serenity on her part and a fierce scowl on his) the photographer had placed a stuffed canary on the top of the camera above its cyclops eye, and chirped: "Now, baby, look at the pretty bird."

That was the one thing, it seemed, that the child wouldn't do. He despised and detested the moth-eaten fraud at sight. He said he felt sick again (No wonder,

John thought), and Clara, dreading a second catastrophe, her lips moving rapidly though her head was still rigidly clamped, commanded the fuzzy-haired manikin to drop the canary business and take off the cap (as he did, with a flourish) while there was time.

"I'm afraid my study may not be a complete artistic success, madam," he said. "The little lad turned his head, and the gentleman's face did not exactly wear a happy expression. At another sitting, perhaps . . ."

Not on your life, John thought. Yet there they were, all three of them, portrayed as the camera had caught them in the year eighteen eighty-nine—Clara had insisted on taking one copy because it was "so good of herself"—the child a mere adumbration of wriggling infancy; Clara, gracious and unperturbed, with a smile of supernal sweetness; John bending above her, a powerfully-built, black-browed, black-bearded, lordly young man of twenty-eight, with a look of rather ruthless self-confidence in his fixed eyes; a man who had shaped his life to his own satisfaction and was standing no nonsense; a successful man, in the prime of his life and strength, proud of his wife, himself, and his family, without a care in the world.

Indeed, looking back on those days, he supposed he should count them as the happiest in his existence. It was a period of positive achievement, yet not devoid of ambition. If it lacked the exaltation of physical rapture, that sense of an eternal spring which had

transfused and transfigured their first year of married life, it was more stable and more composed; if love burned with a milder flame it still radiated a gentle warmth, more comfortable, perhaps, and certainly less distracting than extremes of passion.

There were other changes in their relationship which he remembered finding harder to accept. The centre of the household's interests had shifted. They were no longer equally divided between Clara and himself but concentrated first on little Matthew and, for the balance, on her, as the person more closely connected with their central object. It was not, as he told himself, that she loved him any less, but that she loved the child more than him, and against this preference his possessive nature instinctively rebelled. She was the dearest and richest of his possessions, the only one that really mattered to him. It hurt his pride to surrender any part of her, even though reason told him that Matthew, who was flesh of her flesh in physical truth and not merely by virtue of a mystical sacrament, had a better claim on her. There were moments in his hard-won leisure in which he felt he had a right to her interest and her company when both were flatly denied him, and he felt jealous of this tiny tyrant.

"Is there any reason," he asked, "why you shouldn't come out and get a little fresh air and look at the view with me this evening? Isn't Emma"—the Harbords' maid had returned triumphantly to the house to which

she was "attached"—"perfectly competent to give Matthew his bath just once in a while?"

But she shook her head firmly. "You don't understand," she said. "It's not that I don't trust Emma to bath him—she *is* perfectly competent—but that I want to bath him myself. Why don't you come and watch me?"

There were limits to his powers of baby-worship, but none to hers. Even when they sat at meals, or on winter nights when he sometimes read aloud to her, he knew that Clara's thoughts were not with him: her ears were strained to catch the least whimper from the cot in their room upstairs. Her anxiety was exaggerated, unreasonable. When Matthew was passing through the normal troubles of teething, she was full of needless alarms.

"Don't you think we ought to ask Dr. Findlay to look in for a moment? When Matthew was asleep this morning, his little legs twitched so oddly. Mightn't that be the beginning of convulsions?"

"Convulsions, my darling! What rubbish! I can promise you that Findlay won't thank you for dragging him out for nothing. The child's perfectly all right. And really, after all, I think you might trust me. Three-quarters of the women in Sedgebury are content to trust their babies to me, so why shouldn't you? Let sleeping dogs lie. Their legs always twitch in their sleep."

"What a horrid way of putting it!"

"Well, to tell you the honest truth, you *are* just a bit fussy, my sweet."

She fussed over the child day and night. She was never quite happy when he was not under her eyes. She spent half her time, it seemed to John Bradley, in dressing and undressing him. She came back from North Bromwich laden with parcels of diminutive embroidered garments and lamb's-wool boots and tippets trimmed with swan's-down. The child's wardrobe was even more elaborate than her own.

"Aren't they perfectly sweet?" she would ask him.

It was an effort to share her enthusiasm for these trifles, though he pretended to do so. Sometimes he chaffed her.

"I know now the real reason why women like having babies," he said. "A baby is nothing more than a superior sort of doll. What you really delight in is playing with them and dressing them up and trying new clothes on them."

She laughed. "Why, naturally I enjoy it," she said. "But that isn't all. I love babies. I wish I had half a dozen, and then what would you say? D'you know, Johnny, I do believe you're actually jealous. Talk of dogs, indeed!"

Of course he was jealous; but there was more than that in his dislike of her unmeasured devotion to Matthew. Thinking back on his own haphazard childhood—for which, in his own opinion, he was none the worse, he realized that she was spoiling the child and

that this cunning little animal was taking advantage of it. In those simple days men's (and children's) subconscious minds remained blissfully unexplored, and the dangers of mother-fixations had not been discovered; but, whatever the cause (and the greatest of all was his mother's weakness towards him) little Matthew early developed a diabolical will of his own. He had bred true to the dominant strain. He had his father's and grandfather's jet-black hair, growing low on the forehead; their straight eyebrows gave his face, even in babyhood, a determined air. He was a wilful, passionate child, quick-tempered and obstinate, resentful of all authority. Clara admired these qualities as an earnest of strength of character.

"I'm glad he has a will of his own," she said. "A man needs one these days."

"You're allowing yourself to be made a slave by him," John warned her. "You'll pay for this later on."

"Later on? Why worry about what's going to happen later on? Why shouldn't the poor little thing have a happier childhood than yours or mine?"

"Because he'll have to pay for it by unhappiness afterwards; and if he learns too late, the learning won't be easy."

"Well, well . . ." she said. "I believe you're getting middle-aged, Johnny. You take everything so dreadfully seriously. You're working too hard. What you really need is a holiday. Couldn't you get in a locum and drop everything for a week or two? We

could go to the seaside, just you and me. And Matthew, of course. He's never seen the sea. What fun it would be to see what he thinks of it!"

"I can tell you that easily. He'd behave like Canute. And you'd call it a naughty sea if it frightened him. But I can't break away. I've far too many cases booked. It's a pity you can't rescue Janet from Boulton Crescent for a week—but of course that's impossible. If you're really longing to go to the seaside, why not ask Mary Sanders? She'd be honoured—what's more, she would pay her own expenses."

(II)

Mary Sanders . .

It was odd, Dr. Bradley thought, that her name and the person it represented had not as yet stolen into his consciousness during this long reverie. Stolen in . . . Yes, that was the proper word for her quiet-moving figure. He had seen Mary first on the afternoon when Clara and he had called to pay their formal respects to the occupants of the new terra-cotta villa. Mr. Sanders, as was his wont, had welcomed them boisterously. There were no inhibitions, as people called them nowadays, about Aaron Sanders. He was a plain Black Country man who had risen from the ranks, dragging a patient wife behind him, and made no bones about it. There was something at once em-

barrassing and disarming in the pride with which he showed them his new home's advantages—including its modern sanitary conveniences and the view he had filched from them. Everything in the house was brand-new. It still smelt of plaster and shavings, of french polish and linoleum. Everything in the house, according to Clara, was vulgar—though so generously and unselfconsciously vulgar as not to be offensive—with the exception of Mary, the Sanders's only daughter.

Clara had taken a fancy to her from the first: her presence was such a surprise and relief amid such surroundings. She was a tall, slim, golden girl. Her colour resembled Clara's save in the fact that her eyes were dark-blue, not green. She was probably six or seven years younger than Clara—no more than nineteen; but her confident composure, contrasting so vividly with her father's hearty ebullience and her mother's nervous anxiety to appear at ease with strangers of a superior caste, made her seem older than she actually was. There was no doubt, Clara said, that she had been expensively educated, "brought up as a lady," as was proved by the unconscious refinement of her speech (she had a low, melodious voice) and the fact that her father's vulgarity did not embarrass her. Her quietness and a sort of schoolgirlish dignity made her doubly attractive—particularly when her father insisted on showing her off in much the same way as he had shown off his furniture and his bathroom. She

was "a great reader" he said—and he had no time to spare for reading himself, nor yet had "mother"—and a "dab hand at music"; among the rest of the "set-up" he had bought her a new piano.

"Why don't you give us a tune, Polly?" he said—"Polly" was quite the wrong name for her, John Bradley thought—and she moved to the piano obediently and sat down and played, while her father nodded his head approvingly and cast anxious glances at both the visitors to make sure that his daughter's skill, so expensively purchased, was being appreciated.

John Bradley knew nothing about music. Though he liked to hear Clara playing, because he knew that it made her happy, and would sit while she played, contentedly, not so much listening to her as allowing her to provide a background for wandering thoughts, it had been her despair to discover that he was tone-deaf. Even now he derived no æsthetic pleasure from Mary Sanders's accomplishment—but a good deal from the sight of her slim, upright figure so delicately imposed on the background of the ebony piano. When she had finished her piece and her hands fell to the sides of her chair, he saw they were shapely, longer-fingered than Clara's and white as the ivory keyboard.

"She can sing, too, can't you, Polly?" Mr. Sanders announced with another explanatory wink.

"Not now, dad," she answered.

"Go on, then! What's up with you now?"

Mary shook her head.

"I quite like Mr. Sanders," Clara said afterwards. "He's so consistent, isn't he? The same all the way through, like a piece of soap. I do hope he'll remember what he said—you know: about giving Matthew a go-cart. He's getting too big for the bassinet now. I suppose it wouldn't be really polite to jog his memory?"

"Oh, no . . . you couldn't do that," John said hurriedly.

"Of course I'm not going to, Johnny. But I'm perfectly sure he wouldn't mind if I did. The old woman's pathetic, isn't she? So lost among all that awful new furniture and scared of her 'h's.' The girl has got over that. She plays quite well too."

"I thought she was a nice, modest child. And pretty, as well."

"Pretty? That girl pretty? Well, really, Johnny, I thought you had better taste. A scraggy, anæmic schoolgirl like that!"

"I thought it was a bit of luck for you to find anyone so musical as that just over the road."

"Yes," Clara answered doubtfully, "of course that is rather nice."

And in a little time, indeed, she and Mary became great friends. Often, when John came home from his work, he would find her and Clara talking together so intimately that he felt himself an intruder. Since they came to Sedgebury Clara had found no real woman friend with whom she could chatter about things that

a man would find boring. The other doctors' wives were older than she and had their own friends, while Mrs. Martyn of Silver Street, kind as she might be, was inclined to be patronizing. She was on calling terms with people like Lady Hingston at Stourford Castle.⁹ In her eyes, after all, the new young doctor and his wife were just "nice little people." Clara was glad, as a matter of fact, of Mary Sanders's frequent visits; not merely because she liked her, but because she could patronize her, just a little, herself.

For Clara, in these years of prosperity, was developing social ambitions. She had a good deal of time on her hands. For one thing it seemed that she was not, as she had hoped, going to have another baby, and that freed her energies. As soon as he was old enough she had arranged for Matthew to be sent in Emma's charge every day to a kindergarten (the very latest thing in Education) which had sprung up unexpectedly in Sedgebury. Mrs. Martyn of Silver Street was sending her three little girls there. That was enough of itself to fire Clara to emulation; and John Bradley approved: by now, thanks to her methods, the child was becoming almost unmanageable, and it was time the young Tartar was handled by somebody who was less afraid of him than she and the long-suffering Emma. There were already a surprising number of children in Miss Pidgeon's kindergarten: a fact which showed of itself how the character of the population of Sedgebury was changing. Many small manufac-

turers as successful as Aaron Sanders, and some better-educated, were setting up factories and building homes within reach of them.

Clara called and left cards religiously on all of them, and many, thanks to her charms, came to John as patients. They played whist in winter and tennis in summer, and invited their friends to supper with them (just "pot-luck, you know") on a Sunday evening. John got on very well with the men—he could always do that—and Clara was much in request because of her music. She had decided to have an "At Home" day—she wrote on her cards "First Thursdays"—and managed to crowd as many as twenty visitors into the little living-room. (It was a pity the house was so poky, she explained, but a doctor, of course, had to live in the centre of things.) On First Thursdays John took care to have an afternoon round. If he finished early, he went for a walk and gazed at the Clees or shut himself up in his consulting-room until the surgery door opened at six. But Clara throve on social excitement. On the evenings of her "At Home Days" she was always flushed and elated: full of what Mrs. Phippen, the new bank-manager's wife, had told her; of how Mrs. Hadley, of the Salter's End Galvanized Iron Company, had worn a new taffeta costume with sleeves cut close to the shoulders (the leg of mutton, she said, was quite *démodé*) and was cutting her hair in a fringe, like the Princess of Wales; of how there was going to be a great garden-party at Stourford

Castle, and what a shame it was they didn't know the Hingstons!

"Shall we never have any patients of that kind, Johnny?" she said.

That was her ultimate aim, of course: formal acquaintance, the pride of being on calling-terms, with the new industrial aristocracy of the Black Country, Hingstons, Willises and the rest of them, who had amassed their fortunes during the wars of the mid-nineteenth century, who were now so firmly established that nobody questioned their origins and who had no truck with such recent arrivals on the map as Aaron Sanders of the Jubilee Perambulator Works; or with Mr. Hadley of the Galvanized Iron Company, whose wife did her shopping in London and cut her hair in a fringe like the Princess of Wales. That was quite as it should be, Clara thought; but surely the professional classes, doctors and lawyers and parsons of the Established Church, had the right of entry to this august society?

At the time, John had looked on his wife's social ambitions benevolently. After all, she was every bit as well-bred as the Hingstons and Willises, and if their society pleased her why shouldn't she seek it? Looking back on them now, dispassionately, he saw their unimportance and was forced to confess that they were unworthy and snobbish.

"Why did you only put 'L.S.A.' on your plate?" she asked him one day.

"Because that's all I am. A Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries."

"I think Findlay's looks much more impressive. He calls himself 'Dr.' Findlay."

"He's a Doctor of Medicine. He's taken the 'M.D.' of Brussels."

"So he's really a doctor, and you aren't?"

"It's quite correct to speak of me as 'Dr.' Bradley. It's a courtesy title."

"Couldn't you take an 'M.D.' yourself, Johnny?"

"I suppose I could if I wanted to. It's easy enough to get one at Durham or Brussels. Though it doesn't mean anything. I'm just as well qualified as Findlay."

"It *looks* so much better, doesn't it? I'm sure people notice the difference between your plate and his."

"Well, if you feel so strongly, I'll go up to Durham and take an 'M.D.' some day. It's only a matter of form for a man who's already qualified."

"I wish you would, darling."

The new plate went up: John Bradley, M.D.; but still she was not satisfied.

"Your name looks so bald and uninteresting, Johnny," she complained.

"I can't help that, after all, darling."

"Are you certain they didn't christen you with a second name? What was your mother called before she married your father?"

"Lavinia Powys."

"Oh, what a lovely name! Why on earth have you

never told me? I believe Powys is the family name of Lord Clun. You may even be distantly related."

John laughed. "I don't think so. What do names matter, anyway?"

"I consider they matter a great deal. If I'd only known I should have given Matthew 'Powys' for his middle name instead of 'Medhurst.' The new doctor who's come to Mawne Heath in partnership with Wills and Findlay is called Altrincham-Harris. A hyphen is so distinguished. Nearly all doctors have hyphenated names in these days. There's Simpson-Lyle in North Bromwich and Vincent-Jones in Dulston, and—what is it?—Cavendish-Smith."

"Much good may it do them!"

"It probably does quite a lot. People like things like that. I think Powys-Bradley sounds perfectly natural, too. I should like to be called 'Mrs. Powys-Bradley, Johnny.'"

"I'm afraid you never will be, darling."

"Why not? Isn't there such a thing as changing one's name by deed-poll or something?"

"There may be for all I know; but I shall never change mine."

"You see, if you did," she persisted, "it would be so nice for Matthew when he goes to a public school."

"If the boys got to know his father had changed his name to a double-barreler they'd only rag the poor kid about it."

She was more interested in Matthew's future at that time, it seemed to him, than in her husband's present. Her idolization, he felt, was bad for the boy.³ Miss Pidgeon's kindergarten had not been a success, for Miss Pidgeon was no disciplinarian. The poor lady's sole qualification had been her undoubted gentility, and the lack of any other had forced her to abandon her school for the profession which was her obvious, unenviable fate—that of a nursery-governess in the homes of the newly rich. After a short and stormy interlude, Matthew had been sent to a preparatory school in Sutton Vesey, on the Staffordshire side of North Bromwich, which had been chosen by Clara because Lady Hingston had placed her two boys in it. Now she was nursing the ambition of sending Matthew to Eton in the wake of these paragons: it was such an advantage in after life for a boy to mix with the sons of "really nice people."

"You mean really rich people," John told her, "and we are not rich. I'm just a hard-working general practitioner with a prosperous practice. It's time we began to save money, my dear, for a rainy day, and it wouldn't be fair to the boy to force him out of the class to which he belongs. We could never afford to send him to Eton anyway."

"Mr. Meadows says he would almost certainly get a scholarship. He's lazy, I know, but he's easily the cleverest boy in the school for his age."

John let the subject drop. It was perfectly true

that Matthew had a good brain. A much better brain, he was proud to confess, than his own, but of a different kind. He had the kind of instinctive talent for mathematics which is exhibited, in a higher degree, by the prodigies called "calculating boys." He was musical, too. It had been one of Clara's earliest delighted discoveries that he had "absolute pitch": if she struck a note on the piano, he could tell without hesitation what it was. When he was naughty, as a child, she had discovered that the only way to bring him to reason and make him quiet was to play to him. She had given him his first music lessons at an age when he had to be perched on a hassock to reach the keyboard. By the time he was ten he could read at sight even better than she, and was being exhibited at her "First Thursdays" as an infant prodigy. When he came home for the holidays he played the piano from morning till bed-time. John often wished he would stop, but Clara encouraged him.

Matthew was not, he confessed for all his fatherly preference, altogether a pleasant child. John Bradley found his nature too complicated for his own simple taste. He was not even (indeed he had never been) a beautiful child: there was too much of his paternal grandfather in him for that. He was tall, swart, loose-limbed and awkward, as John himself had been; he had much of the Bradley physique without the Bradley strength, and a subtle brain that somehow seemed out of keeping and touch with his unsubtle body. The

contrast between the two expressed itself as much in his sudden rages, his wilfulness, his bursts of high spirits, as in the periods between, when he showed himself languid and sulky: a stranger, seeing only this side of him, would have thought him stupid.

Nor was he as healthy as might have been expected from his excellent heredity. As an infant he had often ailed. Hardly a month passed in which Clara did not call on the patient Findlay to account for some trivial divergence from the normal. Later on he had contracted every current infectious disease—measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pox, mumps—and “taken” them more severely than most other children. When he first went to the preparatory school a new ailment had declared itself—one foreshadowed already by the train-sickness which had ruined that memorable visit to the photographer’s—sick-headaches that crushed and paralysed him with agonizing pain for twelve hours at a stretch.

When Clara first saw him in the grip of one of these paroxysms, blanched, blinded and speechless, she was overwhelmed with terror: the word “meningitis” immediately came into her mind. She sent out an urgent message for John, who was on his round, and he hurried home.

“There’s nothing to be alarmed at,” he told her. “It’s only an attack of classical migraine. He’ll be better by evening.”

“What is migraine?”

"Nobody really knows. We beg the question and call it a spasmodic neurosis."

"That doesn't help much! Can't you stop this awful pain?"

"I'll give him a small dose of bromide and antipyrin at once. It may relieve him. The worst cases don't respond very well."

"He can't go on like this much longer: the pain will kill him."

"No, it won't do that, thank heaven. The attack won't last more than twelve hours. But if he's had one, he's bound to have others, poor little chap. They're often hereditary: I believe my mother suffered from them. People who have migraine are usually healthy otherwise and live to a ripe old age, so you needn't be frightened. There's another odd thing: the people who suffer from migraine are usually first-rate intellectually and sometimes men of genius."

"That's some consolation, Johnny, but not very much."

"And often they grow out of them by the time they're fifty."

"By the time he's fifty we may both be dead and buried. What an awful prospect for the poor lamb! Oh, how cold you are, John!"

"You know I'm not cold at all, my sweet. I'm speaking to you as a doctor. The best thing you can do when he's had his medicine is to leave him alone in a darkened room to sleep it off if he can."

But she would not leave him. Whenever Matthew collapsed with one of these periodical attacks she insisted on sitting with him in the dark till the pain miraculously vanished, as suddenly as it had come. If he were ill, or merely ailing, everything else had to go by the board. Her passion for the child obsessed, consumed and dominated her. On such occasions it was as though John did not exist. Matthew's delicacy and sensitiveness, she said, entitled him to particular treatment. He was "different" from other boys: and she made it her duty to humour and pamper him in a way that made John Bradley reflect sardonically on his own drastic "dragging up" under his father and "Dr." Mortimore, for which, indeed, he considered himself none the worse. It was only because of his loving tenderness towards Clara, whose feelings, so much important than his own, he could not bring himself to hurt, that he had weakly allowed her to coddle the boy so monstrously.

For, though in his early childhood Matthew had been weakly, at the age of twelve, when he left the preparatory school and won his scholarship, not at Eton but at Brunston, he was not an unhealthy boy: a bit overgrown for his age, no doubt, and still subject to periodical headaches, but high-spirited and sufficiently sound in wind and limb to have made himself a nuisance during his last term at Sutton Vesey.

Matthew is a precocious boy, the head-master had written to John in private. He is exceptionally clever

and knows it. He also knows how to turn his cleverness to advantage by imposing on his companions. A number of my boys have found this out and resent it, but he usually "brings it off," as he is very strong for his age. He has what I suppose is called "an artistic temperament"—you will have read Mr. Phillips's enthusiastic report on his music, and, no doubt, allowances must be made for that. All the same, it is evidently high time for him to "find his place," and that is why I am glad you let him sit for the scholarship at Brunston, which is quite a good school, but by no means a soft one. If you'll excuse me for saying so, I think Matthew's mother spoils him—with an only child that is not an unusual difficulty—but there's a lot of good stuff in him, and I've a strong suspicion that when he goes to a larger school, and meets boys who are older and cleverer than himself, and finds he isn't the only pebble on the beach, he'll lose a good many of the angles that have been—shall we say?—rather trying. After all, he's still only a child, and has plenty of time to learn.

John Bradley welcomed the experiment with grim satisfaction. During the long summer holidays he had seen more than one example of the cleverness to which the headmaster had referred. Matthew usually got his own way: he was already an adept at exploiting his mother's softness, and judged to a millimetre how far he could go with his father, whom he really did fear—though, when the situation grew dangerous to

himself, he was cunning enough to play one parent off against the other.

"I think you are most unsympathetic with Matthew," Clara complained. "A mere baby of twelve! You speak to him as roughly as if he were a man."

John Bradley held his peace. He was far too busy to deal with the problem thoroughly, and showed a good deal of forbearance in avoiding a clash which would probably have hurt Clara more than Matthew, whose skin was tougher. He agreed with the prophecy in Meadows's letter (which he did not show to Clara) that a term or two at Brunston would do the trick. Considering the school-fees he was paying, he thought it only fair that the Brunston masters—and boys—should do this job for him.

It was a great relief—to Clara as well as to himself, if she had only known it—when Matthew went off to school again. It had been a good year for Sedgebury and for the practice. The place was enjoying the first-fruits of the bicycle boom. The new tube-works, a branch of the Willis organization, were turning out frames by the thousand, and Aaron Sanders, conscious of the falling birth-rate, was going slow with his bassinets and assembling two types of machines: a "Jubilee Tricycle" and a "Jubilee Safety Bicycle." All England was swept by the craze for swift locomotion. Duchesses were said to be pedalling away like mad in Hyde Park, and whatever duchesses did, the ladies of

the Black Country tried to do eighteen months later. Aaron Sanders, as usual masking his generosity under the pretext of a good advertisement, insisted on presenting John and Clara with a tricycle apiece.

"You can have two of our Jubilee Safeties if you like," he told Clara. "It's all the same to me—the damned things cost next to nothing anyway and sell like hot cakes. But you know, Mrs. Bradley, if you ask my honest opinion, I don't reckon a bicycle's womanly. Our Polly says I'm an old-fashioned cuss, and no doubt I am, *and* proud of it, but if I saw you or her or mother astride of one of my safeties I should eat my 'eart out, that's straight."

So two "Jubilee Tricycles" arrived, whose wheels, spinning on well-oiled bearings, enlarged their freedom. In the last week of September the pressure of work relaxed—it was difficult to believe that anyone could be ill in such brilliant weather. Though John still shied at a holiday, he consented to arrange for Wills and his partner to attend to any emergencies during the day. He and Clara and Mary Sanders would set out together on their new machines, exploring the green depths of Worcestershire which, up till now, had seemed to them as mysterious as an African jungle. It was surprising how near this unsullied countryside lay. Though there were always rumours of new coalpits being sunk on the Sedgebury ridge, the lava-flow of the Black Country's latest eruption still stood halted short of John's viewpoint. Beyond that

the green began. In five minutes they could drop down into the leafy maze of lanes and watery valleys surrounding Cold Harbour. Within half an hour they could lose themselves in the heart of Worcestershire, discovering shy villages of which they had never heard—Chaddesbourne d'Abbot, Grafton, Lovett, Monk's Norton and many more—where they loitered and ate enormous teas which slow-spoken women brought to them in the parlours of village inns. Once they rode to Worcester, visiting the cathedral, where bad King John lay waiting to slip into paradise between the two saints he had chosen as his escort, and the Porcelain Works, where Clara bought a highly-decorated cup and saucer—for Matthew, of course. "I do wish he were here," she said. "He would have been so interested!"

The best part of these holiday excursions for John was the fact that, apart from her thoughts, he had Clara to himself again. Not quite to himself. Mary Sanders was usually with them, though so unobtrusively that she hardly seemed to count. By this time she was almost "one of the family"; he regarded her as a grown-up daughter, neither woman nor child, the kind of daughter he might have had if only fate had been kinder to them. During these years he had grown very fond of Mary Sanders—or "Polly" as Clara mischievously called her, because she knew it annoyed him. She was so graceful, so quiet, so understanding, so quick to appreciate the little jokes he made and

which Clara, whose thoughts were often with Matthew, often missed or considered foolish.

"You two behave like a couple of children," she said. "If anybody heard you talking I should be ashamed of you."

That was the charm, had she only known it, of their relationship, though Mary, in some ways, was less of a child than herself. She could be serious as well as light-hearted. She was, as her father had boasted, a great reader, and had as eager an interest in abstract things as Clara had in people. John found a new delight in exploring this fresh young mind, as full of light and innocence, it seemed to him, as this green countryside. He could talk with her about the books she had read (the books he wished he had time to read), about poetry, even about politics—subjects which Clara, although he adored her, would only have found boring. During those long, bright days, as they rode through the lanes together or sat idly gazing over the green plain or on the shapes of distant hills, Mary lost her shyness. In those quiet talks they arrived at an intimacy of a kind which was new to him and wholly delightful.

Clara watched it develop with secure amusement. She knew John so well by now, the dear, honest, plodding old thing, with his fantastically scrupulous conscience, that she saw no danger in their friendship. He was a "family man," naturally faithful, if ever there was one. She only hoped that his interest

wouldn't turn that poor child's head, though indeed, young and pretty and well-educated as she was, it did seem a pity that her parents' vulgarity should isolate her from the admiration of the "right kind" of young men. She was genuinely fond of Mary. If only she herself had attained her social ambitions, if only she had not been forced to spend her days in this desert of Sedgebury, she might have been able to do something about it. (When Clara was not being maternal her mind ran towards match-making.) Yet the staidest of "family men," after all, were men. It was foolish to court unnecessary risks; just as well to make it quite clear to the child how completely John was her property; to show him off as the obedient husband he was by trifling—and occasionally irritating—whims and exactions.

"How you two do go on!" she would say, when she thought they had talked long enough. "Come over here, Polly dear, and sit by me. You must't let Johnny bore you. He knows no more about this war than there's going to be in South Africa than I do. I never told you about that bewitching toque Lady Hingston was wearing when she opened the flower-show. Her white hair makes her look so much younger than she is. It's perfectly lovely. I do hope I shall never go grey by degrees. . . ."

John was not greatly interested. He knew, too, by the smile on Clara's lips, the teasing challenge in her eyes (and both were still lovely to him) that

she had deliberately snatched Mary away. When he saw them deep in their women's talk of fashions and gossip, he felt vaguely jealous. Whether he were jealous of Clara or of Mary was better left undecided.

Perhaps the crown of these expeditions (which he remembered now so much more clearly than the long periods of monotonous drudgery that stretched on either side of them) was their return at evening, deliciously tired and drugged with fresh air, when, still in a holiday mood, his surgery finished, they sat down to a cold supper enjoyed with country appetites. After that the two women would play the piano. Sometimes Mary would sing to Clara's accompaniment. She sang, without affectation, old, simple songs which John Bradley would understand and enjoy without effort: among them the song he remembered his mother singing—*My Mother bids me bind my hair*. It was odd how that tune and those words brought time to nothing. When he heard them, listening, with closed eyes, he was far away in Lesswardine, an unhappy child. But when he opened his eyes again and saw Clara sitting at the piano with the air of rapt solemnity she had when she played, and Mary standing beside her, slim and white in the dusk like a tall votive candle unlit, it came over him of a sudden what a proud man he should be; happily married, prosperous, contented, a man in the prime of life, with no fear of the future, sitting there in his own arm-chair

in the house he had bought and paid for by his own labours.

(III)

Yes, those days, Dr. Bradley reflected again, were assuredly the most happy in all his long life. It was odd, when one came to think of it, how little of a life, however long it might be, really mattered, how much was not memorable or significant: no more than a waste of time, a living death.

So, it seemed to him, were the years immediately following the Diamond Jubilee: once more he had watched the long chain of beacons flaring into the sky from Abdon Burf to the Forest of Dean, but, this time, alone; for Clara had rushed off to Brunston to be with Matthew during his two days' holiday. And then came the war in South Africa, about which he and Mary had talked. The Boer War had been a godsend for Sedgebury. Spades, harness-furnishings, entrenching tools, buckets, bicycles, galvanized sheets—all these were needed. The little boom spread itself over all the Black Country trades. Folk discovered once more, to his benefit, that they could afford to be ill. It was not, he felt at the bottom of his heart, a creditable war, though there was no point in letting people who throve on it know that one's sympathies were with the Boers. And it wasn't after all, a very

serious war. The total casualties were far less than the deaths inflicted by the influenza epidemic ten years earlier. No Sedgebury man, so far as he knew, was killed. They were too busy making spades, buckets, bicycles and entrenching-tools. War, in those days, was the business of armies, not of peoples. Sir Joseph Hingston lost his second son with enteric in Bloemfontein. If that war had come ten years later, when the anti-typhoid vaccine was perfected, he need not have died. Twenty thousand men need not have died. That was an answer to those who talked about the smug impotence of Medicine!

Medicine could not save the old Queen. The war had broken her heart, people said; but it was a pretty tough old heart to have gone on beating for so many years. The new king, uncrowned, a far softer subject, went down with Appendicitis. Sir Frederick Treves put him on the table and opened his abdomen. If his abdomen had been opened fifteen years earlier, when John was a student, he would almost certainly have died and the Duke of York, whom nobody thought much of, become king instead of him. He would probably have died in any case, for in those days appendicitis had never been heard of. Sir Frederick Treves would have shaken his head, called it Peritonitis and put on "comforting applications." But the King's abdomen was opened, and the King lived. Lister's antiseptic nonsense had come into its own. John wondered what dear old Cartwright would think of it now.

Appendicitis, the royal disease, became fashionable. The duchesses, who had given up cycling for bridge—the King's favourite game—went down with it like a stack of court cards. Lady Hingston, not to be outdone, staged a fulminating attack. The embarrassing vestige was removed at Stourford Castle by that brilliant young surgeon Martin Lacey of North Bromwich. She was so pleased with the result that she implored all her friends to let him operate on them while there was time.

Even John's middle-class patients began to suspect that their appendices were inflamed. Clara herself became frightened.

"What *is* Appendicitis, Johnny?" she questioned him.

"Inflammation of the Vermiform Appendix."

"Don't be silly: I know that. What is the Appendix?"

"A small vestigial structure attached to the cæcum: a remnant of the days when men were grass-eating animals."

"Like Nebuchadnezzar? You're teasing. I don't believe a word of it. Why does it become inflamed?"

"God only knows. Some say it's through swallowing grape-pips."

"And it comes on suddenly."

"The acute attack does as a rule. People generally have warnings beforehand. Pain, sickness and so on."

"Does it attack children too?"

"Oh, yes."

"So Matthew might have it?"

"I might have it myself."

"That wouldn't be nearly so bad as a thing like that happening to a child."

"Well, the odds are more than a thousand to one against his having it anyway. There's no more likelihood of Matthew's getting it to-day than there was before King Edward was operated on. And the King got over it, didn't he?"

A few evenings later he came home to find Clara fluttering with terror.

"I thought you would never come, Johnny," she said. "I'm so worried about Matthew."

"Why on earth. . . ?"

"You said sickness was a warning of appendicitis, and Matthew's always sick when he has his attacks."

"But that's quite different, darling."

"How can you know that for certain? And there's another awful thing: last week, without thinking, I sent him a box of grapes. Suppose he's swallowed them whole! You know how greedy boys are."

"They probably won't hurt him if he has."

"Well, I sent the headmaster a telegram warning him in any case. It cost rather a lot to send with so many words. But I had to do it."

"I bet it will puzzle him when he gets it, my sweet; but I agree that it was cheap at any price if it made you feel happier."

"It wasn't a question of making me feel happier," she said angrily. "I can't think what's wrong with you lately, Johnny. You seem never to understand."

It was on his tongue to tell her that she had made herself ridiculous, but, seeing how angry she was, he refrained. Clara had no need any longer to worry herself about Matthew's health. He had not been coddled at Brunston and the hard life had toughened him. What was more, if he hadn't exactly "found his own level," he was much less uppish. His looks as well as his manners had improved. By fourteen he had lost not only that sullen, ungainly air which, as a small boy, had made him so unattractive, John thought, to anyone but his mother, but also that trace of a Black Country accent which he had picked up in Sedgebury as easily as the zymotic diseases of childhood. Now he spoke the dialect which, having no accent save the faintest suggestion of Cockney, is regarded as cultured speech. He seemed a well-mannered boy, no longer too tall for his age, with an eager, likeable though hardly angelic face above the starched Eton collar. The indeterminate features had begun to take shape; the black, rebellious hair had been reduced to comparative tidiness; and his hands—he still "learnt" the piano and had "taken up" the violin—were carefully kept. He was so presentable, in short, and appeared so modest and subdued, that John Bradley felt proud of him for the first time in his life since his early days of

triumphant paternity, when there had really been nothing to feel proud of.

"I think Matthew's improved enormously," he told Clara.

"You mean in health?"

"No, I mean in manners."

"I never found anything wrong with his manners, John. You can't expect polished manners in a delicate child," she said rather scornfully.

"I wish you could get the idea that he's delicate out of your head, my darling. He's never had a day's sickness in two years at Brunston."

"He still has his headaches. The last one was simply shattering. I think it's ridiculous that you doctors can't find a cure for them. Just because they don't kill people you do nothing about it; you just tell them: 'Wait till you're fifty, and then you'll grow out of them.' You haven't the faintest idea how that poor child suffers. And they leave him so limp and irritable, too."

"And able to do what he likes with you and take it out of you."

"Well . . . I happen to be his mother, you see," she said proudly.

John did not, providentially perhaps, see much of his son when he was at home. The boy was always flying about on the bicycle that Aaron Sanders, with his usual generosity, had given him. He had a suspicion that Matthew, having experienced the sanctionary

powers of the masters at Brunston, was a little afraid of him. Up to a certain point that was all to the good, though he felt it would be a pity if the boy came to regard him as nothing but a source of retribution and pocket-money. He tried, in his limited leisure, to understand Matthew and make friends with him, inviting his confidence, endeavouring to share his interests. Not very successfully; for Matthew was not forthcoming. In spite of his youth he made John Bradley feel himself a person of humble birth and of small importance who had not had the privilege of being educated at a public school. It was quite possible that no thoughts of that kind ever entered the boy's mind. But there it was. The more John offered himself as a friend, the more he was made to feel the distance between them. Matthew remained, as he had always been, his mother's boy. Provided that it made both of them happy, what did it matter? "But if only," he thought, "we had had a daughter who grew up like Mary Sanders!"

His presence did make Clara happy without any doubt; but it was also a strain on her. Matthew "took it out of her," as John said, far more than she knew. She must submit—and, in fact, submitted gladly—to the boy's every whim, and wore herself out for him. She must walk, she must cycle, she must play duets and chess; she must stay in the dark with him when he had his headaches; she must sit by his bed at night and stroke his hair till he went to sleep. Her physical

strength was no match for Matthew's; she could not keep pace with him and his will was stronger than hers. It was no good, John knew, trying to save her from these impositions: Clara was up in arms in a moment if he criticized the boy in any way. He could only prescribe a tonic and hope for the best—in this case the date of Matthew's return to Brunston.

Towards the end of the summer holidays there occurred an incident which John Bradley was to remember for the rest of his life. That year the Three Choirs Festival was being held in Worcester and Clara had arranged to take Matthew to a performance of *The Messiah* as a final treat. Mary Sanders accompanied them. As the trains from Dulston ran awkwardly, they all cycled down to Stourton Junction, left their machines in the cloak-room and went on by rail to Worcester. As was usual when any excitement was planned ahead, Matthew started the day with premonitions of a headache. To the morning's feast of music were added Severn salmon and plum tart with whipped cream, a fatal combination; by the time they reached Stourton on their return he was so prostrated as to be incapable of riding the rest of the way and had to be driven home in a hired four-wheeler. The attack was by far the most severe he had ever had. Clara sat up all night with him, much to John Bradley's disgust, and appeared at breakfast next morning almost as irritable and exhausted as Matthew himself. It was clear that each had got on the other's nerves.

A few minutes before six, when he came home for his evening surgery, John heard a sound of raised voices: Clara and Matthew were quarrelling. For an instant he stood in the passage and listened. He heard Clara saying:

"How can you, Matthew! How dare you answer your mother like that? When I'm tired and ask you to do a little thing, you've no right to snap at me. Just think what I do for you."

"Well, I'm not your servant. Why should I fetch and carry for you? What's Emma here for? If you don't make her do what she's paid for, you're just a silly fool."

John waited to hear no more. He had watched Clara's self-abnegation jealously for more than a month and his patience had reached its limit. He walked into the room. He saw Clara lying on the sofa, her face pale after her sleepless night, her lips quivering as though she were going to cry. Matthew's face, too, was pale; but his black brows scowled and his mouth looked angry and scornful. At the sight of this rebellious figure all the pent irritation of years was released in John Bradley's mind. His face must have shown it; for Clara rose in alarm and the boy edged away from him as he advanced. John followed him.

"You've been cheeking your mother, have you, you insolent cub? I'll teach you to do that again! What you need is a thrashing."

He grabbed at Matthew's collar and missed him. A

chair crashed over. It was not a dignified spectacle: the tall bearded man, his face flushed with anger, pursuing the frightened boy. But John had no thought of dignity. He was going to do what should have been done long before, to give the young devil a lesson he would remember. He caught the boy by the scruff of the neck and shook him and went on shaking him, so blind with anger now that he hardly knew what he was doing. He could not even stop when Clara flung herself between them, tearing at his arm. It was only when he heard her agonized cry: "Don't . . . don't . . . you'll hurt him!" that his hot brain cleared and his hands relaxed their grip.

Matthew, released, had fallen to the floor, more frightened than hurt, and Clara was kneeling beside the boy, whispering anxious questions. John Bradley, breathing heavily, put his hands to his eyes. Some strange thing baffled his memory. That agonized cry in his ears: "Don't . . . don't . . . you'll hurt him!" When had he heard it before? And where? His mind struggled back to the cottage down by the river at Lesswardine. The voice that spoke those words was his mother's, and a tall, black-bearded man like himself towered over her, watching her stupidly as she fondled an unconscious child.

He pulled himself slowly together.

"He's all right," he muttered shamefacedly. "He's not really hurt."

Clara did not answer but as she helped the boy to

rise to his feet and stood with her arm about him, she turned momentarily and gazed at John with a terrible coldness, such as he had never seen in her eyes before.

"Come along, my darling," she said.

John Bradley was alone in the room, which still bore traces of the struggle: the floor littered with sheets of music, the overturned chair. He picked up the music methodically and put the chair on its legs again. His brain was now cool, but full of a defensive and righteous resentment.

"It had to be done for her sake," he told himself. "If I put the fear of God into that young devil, so much the better."

(IV)

He saw no more of either of them that evening. Emma, scared and bewildered by the sounds of the struggle which had reached the kitchen, carried up their suppers on a tray, and John ate his stolidly, alone. He sat down and read the paper, taking in nothing. Mary Sanders came over to enquire if Matthew had got over his headache.

"Yes, he's quite all right, thank you," he said with a nervous cheerfulness. "A bit shaken and washed out, as usual, of course."

"And Mrs. Bradley?"

"She's rather tired too. They've both gone to bed.

Won't you sit down and talk to me, Mary?"

She hesitated for a moment and then shook her head.

"Perhaps I'd better not stay to-night," she said quietly. "It *is* rather late."

A wise child, he thought. He was glad she had gone after all. Was it possible that some instinct had warned her of the turbulent state of his emotions? He wondered. . . .

Clara slept in Matthew's room that night. A call to an urgent case dragged John out for an hour in the middle of it. Returning, still vaguely anxious and unhappy, he cautiously opened the door and looked in on them. Clara, wrapped in her dressing-gown, was lying on the bed beside Matthew. She slept calmly; her face was untroubled, but still pale. As he gazed at it there in the shaded light of his candle, he thought he had never seen it more beautiful in its child-like innocence. If he had not been afraid of waking her he would have kissed her. His heart yearned towards her and ached because he had hurt her.

"But it had to be done," he told himself obstinately. "It had to be done."

Next morning, alas! her face did not invite kisses. The fortnight which intervened between that unfortunate evening and the day of Matthew's departure was a foretaste of purgatory. Towards the rest of the world she was herself—a self a thought more high-pitched and high-spirited than usual: to John she pre-

sented the blankness of a complete indifference; she was dutiful and polite, but utterly null. If he had hurt her she extracted a full measure of pain in return. She made it impossible for him to "put things right," by taking care that, in those two weeks, they should never be alone together. She still persisted in sleeping in Matthew's room. The boy, too, had his revenge.

It was not until nearly a month later that John and she were reconciled—and that not by means of any coaxing on his part, but of her own free will. One night, when he had sat up reading as usual, he found her waiting for him in their double bed. The welcome sight made him so excited and nervous that he dared not comment on it. She lay there with closed eyes, as still as an image; yet he believed that while he undressed she was watching him. It was an odd sensation—just as if he were going to bed with a stranger, he thought, or the first night of a marriage of convenience—yet when he blew out the candle and embraced her she did not resist him; when he kissed her, she kissed him in return. So mysterious and so sweet, indeed, was this renewal of love that he dared not tempt providence by speaking of what had passed. He could only tell her he loved her.

"I know that, Johnny," she said. "And I love you, my darling. That is why you can hurt me so dreadfully."

"I would rather die than hurt you," he said.

"That wouldn't help matters, would it?"

"You know what I meant. You've forgiven me, anyway, thank God."

She was silent a while. "Don't let's think of the past," she said. "I want to think of the future."

"The future? What do you mean?"

"I mean . . . well, I'm going to have another baby."

He gasped, "Clara! . . . Are you certain?"

"Well, you're a doctor. You ought to be able to tell me."

"After all these years!"

"Yes, that's why I could hardly believe it. I was terrified to think that it mightn't be true. But I am quite sure now. It's rather wonderful, isn't it? Like the basses in *Unto us a child is born*. I smiled when I heard that at Worcester."

He laughed. "It's more than wonderful. I can't take it in."

After a long pause she said: "I think we should call her Lavinia."

(v)

They talked so much of it and used the name so often that they came to take it for granted that the new baby would be a girl. John hoped, this time, that the child would be fair, like her mother—or, perhaps,

like Mary Sanders. It pained him a little to think that by the time she had reached Mary's age, Clara and he would be well over sixty, with only a few uncertain years left to enjoy her maturity. He was a little concerned as well about Clara's age—she was now thirty-eight, though nobody looking at her would believe it. But Clara herself was in glowing health, full of quiet confidence, and the fact that Matthew had been born so easily encouraged him to think that there need be nothing to dread. It was heartening, too, to think that, in their present more comfortable circumstances, Clara would not be forced to work in the house until the last moment, as she had been when Matthew was born.

In spite of her dreams of her possible daughter's future, Matthew still absorbed the greater part of Clara's thoughts.

"It's so lovely to think that he may have a sister," she said. "If you'd had a sister, I'm sure you'd have understood women better than you do. Until you married me you know nothing whatever about them."

"And now?"

"You don't know an awful lot even now, Johnny. I wonder if I should let Matthew know?"

"He'll know soon enough when he comes home at Easter. Schoolboys know far more than you think. He's a 'forrat lad,' as they say in Sedgebury. He's 'a'gooin' in' fifteen."

"I can never believe it. The years go by so quickly.

I always think of him as a baby, Johnny--and of you as not being much older," she added mischievously. "Do you know, darling," she said to him late that night as she sat meditatively brushing her hair, "I've been thinking again about Matthew's next holidays. He'll be terribly disappointed when he finds that I can't do everything with him . . ."

"That won't hurt him for once in away," John mumbled.

"John, do let me finish! So I thought it might not be a bad plan to get in touch with Janet."

"Janet? Heavens alive, how could *she* get away? The poor girl's still a slave."

"I don't mean for Janet to come here: I thought Matthew might go there."

"What? To Boulton Crescent? There'd be nothing whatever for him to do in North Bromwich, and he's used to fresh air. Besides, how d'you know he'd be welcome? I wasn't aware that your uncle had suffered any change of heart. Does he like you any better than he did?"

"No, I don't think he does. But you see he *might* like Matthew. He's asked Janet about him several times, though he never mentions me. Janet says Uncle Jacob has aged tremendously lately and grown so much softer and supposing he *did* take a fancy to Matthew . . ."

John laughed: "Yes, I see your drift."

"But it's reasonable, isn't it, darling? We know that

Uncle Jacob's enormously rich, and half of his money ought really to have come to me; he's no children of his own and Matthew's his only nephew, and if anything happened to me . . ."

"What nonsense you talk! You're going on splendidly."

"I see you don't like the idea, Johnny."

"I simply hate it. After all, why should we think any more about Dr. Medhurst's money? We don't really want it. We've got quite enough for ourselves in a humble way. But I do think it would be a good plan to get Matthew away for the holidays. We might find some farmhouse where they'd be glad to take him. There's one at Monk's Norton I've heard of: people named Collins. That would do him a world of good. If he did come home he'd just hang about you in the house."

"We should have to give some explanation to satisfy him. If he thought he was in the way he'd take it awfully hard."

"Well, tell the headmaster we don't want him home because there's scarlet fever about here."

"Is that true?"

"I should think it was. There's a regular epidemic, and a nasty type too. We're thinking of closing the elementary schools."

"In that case I'd very much rather he didn't come. I'll write to Dr. Paget to-morrow and to Monk's Norton as well. He could go there direct, without

running the risk of passing through Sedgebury. Mary Sanders could meet him in Worcester and see him installed."

It was a great relief to John Bradley that she had accepted his plan so submissively, though, indeed, her reasonableness was in keeping with her present attitude. She was determined to run no risks over this confinement, and, in Matthew's absence, more placid than she had been for many years. As John told himself, they had both of them reached an age of understanding. In nearly sixteen years of married life all essential differences between them (and there were not many) must surely have been fought out and settled long ago. If their life wasn't serene by this time, it never would be.

And it was, in fact, of a comfortable serenity, resembling (though winter was past) that of a calm September evening: the golden season of fruiting which has none of the turbulence but much of the tenderness of spring. Clara's social strivings no longer troubled her; she was content, for obvious reasons, to stay at home. No visitor invaded their sweet, domestic tranquillity, save Clara's most intimate woman friend, Mary Sanders; and Mary by now was so much a part of their lives that they hardly noticed her coming and going.

As her time approached—the baby was due at the end of April—Clara grew rather more restless and leant on him more heavily. Her dependence touched

him. He was anxious to share as much of the burden as he could. So often as he could be with her, he never left her. Her gratitude was his reward.

"You are good to me, Johnny," she said. "You know, when first we were married you weren't nearly so gentle and patient as you are now. You were always in such a hurry."

He kissed her tenderly. "Ah, well, I suppose we're growing old," he said.

It seemed lucky, John Bradley thought, that the scarlatina epidemic, which continued to rage, had given them so good an excuse for packing Matthew off to the farm at Monk's Norton. Otherwise he would have been filling that small house with his expansive ego on the day—three weeks earlier than Clara had calculated—when her baby was born. They both took the event so calmly as to surprise one another and themselves. Dr. Findlay was by this time established as a pillar of the Wee Free Kirk in Dunoon; but Wills, now the senior partner of the rival firm, still practised. John had known him for sixteen years as a not very brilliant and rather lazy man, who rarely made a mistake. What was almost equally important—Clara trusted him. In any event they had both of them decided in advance that the case would be normal and that Clara would have "a good time."

Wills was called in the middle of the morning surgery. He was still in the house, sitting down to lunch, when John returned from his round.

"Everything going all right?" he asked.

"A bit on the slow side. Your wife isn't a young girl, you know."

"Still, you're satisfied?"

"My dear Bradley, don't get nervy. Harris is doing my work to-day; so I shall be able to stay here in any case and see her through."

John went out again, visiting. Though he wasn't nervous, he was glad of any distraction. By the time he came home for tea the damned business would almost certainly be over. Mary Sanders awaited him in the living-room.

"Dr. Wills was asking for you just now," she said. "I'll tell him you've come."

Wills appeared in his shirt-sleeves. He was rather red in the face, but didn't look worried.

"Ah, there you are, Bradley," he said. "I'm glad you've come. The poor girl's getting rather overdone. I wish you'd give her a whiff of chloroform while I help matters on. It won't take long: I've got everything ready and it's quite unnecessary to worry Harris while you're on the spot."

"You'll have to use forceps? I'm sorry."

"So am I. But in these antiseptic days there's really no danger."

John nodded. "You're in charge of the case."

He followed Wills upstairs. Clara heard his voice outside. She looked over her shoulder and smiled.

"Hullo, Johnny," she said. "I'm making a

nuisance of myself; but Dr. Wills says it's not my fault."

"Mrs. Bradley's been good as gold," the nurse declared emphatically.

There was a smell of Lysol in the room. John was glad to notice a sterilizer steaming over a spirit-lamp on the wash-hand-stand. Wills had moved with the times.

"Dr. Wills wants me to give you a whiff of chloroform," he said.

"Well, anything would be better than this. Will it be very horrid?"

"Not a bit, if you breathe it in slowly and steadily. Some people like it. All you have to do is to fall asleep and trust me to look after you."

"Oh, I trust you all right," she said.

He sprinkled the heavy sweet-smelling liquid on to the mask of lint and bade her breathe deeply. He had given the stuff so often that he was not really nervous. He knew that although patients sometimes died under anæsthetics in the theatre, there was no recorded case of a death from chloroform administered in childbirth. From the moment when Clara began to inhale, he was no longer her husband, but merely a skilful anæsthetist, his senses intent on the pulse that quickened, then slowed, beneath his finger; on the rhythm and sounds of her breathing, the size of the pupil he saw when he lifted one eyelid, the colour of her face. It was not his business—indeed it would

have been a lapse from duty—to wonder what Wills was doing on the other side of the bed. He was so absorbed that when Wills said: "That's enough, thanks," it took him by surprise. Then the patient became Clara once more. He bent over—nobody was looking—and kissed her unconscious face.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"She's all right, never fear. I thought there was something amiss, though. The baby's been dead for some time."

"What is it?"

"A girl," the nurse told him.

"What a damned shame! The poor child will be dreadfully disappointed. We'd counted on having a girl."

"Yes, it is a shame," the nurse said. "Such a lovely child, too, with fair hair—the very image of Mrs. Bradley!"

"No use worrying over the child," Wills said heartily. "It's our business to thank our stars the mother's all right."

(vi)

Clara took it remarkably well, though John knew that her disappointment was even greater than his. He had never more deeply admired her fortitude.

"Don't let's talk about it," she said. "We've still

a lot to be thankful for. First of all, that I shan't have to go through this weary business again. And then, that I'm still alive. I've got you and you've got me, darling. And we've both got Matthew. We'll say nothing about this to him. I shall go down to Brunston for a week-end as soon as I'm better."

"I shall keep you chained up for at least a month," he told her.

On the fourth day after her confinement Clara startled him with a little shiver.

"What's that?" he said.

"Oh, nothing. . . . A goose walked over my grave, I suppose."

By nightfall she showed a slight rise of temperature. John felt anxious; but Wills refused to regard it as serious.

"Just a little absorption, probably," he said. "Nothing out of the way. It'll be back to normal to-morrow."

In the night she complained of pain in her joints, and thirst. Her skin was hot and dry: her thin wrist burnt John's hand when he touched it to take her pulse, and the pulse was rapid. In the small hours a violent rigor shook her. Her teeth chattered when she tried to speak.

"It's something bigger than a goose this time, Johnny," she said.

When Wills took her temperature next morning it was a hundred and three.

"I can't quite understand this," he said. "I can see no reason for it: there's no possible source of infection that I can think of. You saw for yourself how careful I was about taking every sort of antiseptic precaution. I'm prepared to swear that my hands and the forceps were sterile. As the case was that of a colleague's wife I was even more careful, if that's possible, than I usually am."

That night Clara's temperature shot up to a hundred and four. Her body was like a furnace; her mind wandered occasionally, and once in the night she cried out: "Don't . . . Don't . . . You'll hurt him." Then she came to herself and smiled when she saw John beside her: "I'm so thirsty, darling, and so dreadfully hot. Is the window wide open?"

By dawn John could stand it no longer. He pedalled down to Mawne Heath and dragged Wills out of bed.

"We ought to call in a consultant."

"I quite agree, Bradley. I was going to suggest it myself."

"Well, whom would you like?"

"Simpson-Lyle's the best man in this line."

"Is his house on the telephone?"

"Almost certainly, I should think. But I really don't know if they keep the thing going at night, and there's no exchange in Mawne Heath. Let me think. . . . Yes, the Willises have just put one in at Mawne Hall, and they're patients of mine. I'm sure Walter Willis won't mind me using his instrument. By the

time I've put the horse in it will be quite light." They drove down through the silent waste of slag-heaps and cinders to Mawne Hall, where thrushes and blackbirds were singing in Walter Willis's shrubberies. A cuckoo, launched from the tree-tops of his hanging garden, sped straight up the valley into the smoke that hung over Haysech, calling as he flew. His note grew fainter and died away in the distance as they stood on the terrace beneath the stucco battlements. At length they succeeded in rousing a blear-eyed butler and forced their way to the telephone.

Simpson-Lyle was away at a medical congress in Dublin and would not be back for a week.

"We'd better get on to someone else while we're here," John said. "Who's the next best man?"

Wills scratched his head. Even now he was hardly awake. "Well, really, upon my soul . . ."

"What about Martin Lacey?" John asked.

"Lacey isn't a gynæcologist. He's a general surgeon. On the young side, too, I should say, though he's quite well spoken of."

"He's a student friend of mine. After all, this is a surgical case."

"I've no objection, though, mind you, I know nothing about him."

Lacey reached Sedgebury by midday in his own motor-car, the first of these infernal machines that had ever entered Crabb's Lane, so disguised in a leather coat and goggles that John did not recognize him when

he stepped out of the panting de Dion. Yet when, in the house, he stripped off these ludicrous garments, John saw he was the same old Lacey—a thought thinner maybe, and more elegant, with his fair hair cut shorter, his face heavily-lined and almost colourless. Wills expounded, in ponderous detail and gave his opinion. He was on the defensive, making out a case for himself, John perceived, and he made quite a good case. The condition was clearly that of a general infection of the blood. There were no local symptoms: no localized pain or tenderness. Lacey listened. John saw the keen blue eyes fixed on Wills. In their light the poor man looked shabby and mean and old. He had the impression that Lacey was more interested in Wills himself than in what he said.

“Let me just get one or two things quite clear before we go up to see your patient,” he said. “The temperature started on the fourth day and we’re now at the sixth. You’ve not kept a four-hourly chart; but the curve, as you say, agrees with your diagnosis of puerperal septicæmia. It was a forceps case. First of all, are you absolutely satisfied that everything was aseptic—hands, towels, instruments?”

“Hands and instruments, anyway. The towels were clean.”

“Very well. Have you lately had any case of puerperal fever in your practice?”

“Not for years. As a matter of fact we’ve been very lucky.”

"Or careful, doctor: I don't believe in luck. Has the nurse been in contact with any such case?"

"Most certainly not."

"Have you, John?"

John shook his head.

"Very well, then. We'll go upstairs. After you, Dr. Wills."

John had always wanted Clara to meet Martin Lacey. It was ironical that fate should have decreed that their first meeting must take place in such circumstances. He was anxious that each should appreciate the quality of the other: the two he had loved best, his wife and his friend. Watching them, he felt proud of them both: of Clara's pathetic braveness; of the other's distinction of mind and body, still undiminished, which had always made him feel (and most people look—as poor Wills looked now) crudely fashioned out of a material of ignoble quality. In his superb intolerant youth, this inborn superiority of Lacey's had occasionally, through no fault of its owner, repelled him; but now, though the diamond hardness and clarity of mind remained, there was in Lacey's voice, in his mouth, in his eyes, a melancholy softness—almost as though, John thought, he had now known suffering or even defeat and acquired from these a new humanity. Clara, dazed and weak as she was, accepted his presence without asking for explanation. The fever had dropped in the night and her mind, though too tired to question, was clear.

"Johnny talked such a lot about you in the old days," she said, "that he almost made me jealous. It's funny, our meeting like this . . . after all these years."

Lacey smiled. "Well, we've met at last, Mrs. Bradley. John has asked me to have a look at you. I'm going to run over your lungs and things of that kind. When I want you to move, I'll move you. There's no need for you to make any effort of any kind. Leave it all to me and don't waste your strength."

He went through with his examination. John watched his hands and his eyes. Neither told him anything.

"Now relax, and go to sleep," Lacey said. He laid his hand on her forehead. "You're not relaxing a bit, you know. You're still a bundle of taut nerves. . . . Yes, that's a bit better."

"I had a miserable night," she said. "Why am I behaving so stupidly? I want to get better quickly for poor Johnny's sake."

"Then just do as he tells you," Lacey said. "That's the quickest way."

As he stood there with his back to them, washing his hands, Clara raised a limp hand and beckoned to John.

"He's nice, Johnny," she whispered. "Much nicer than I thought. Is he married?"

John shook his head. "I don't think so."

"What a pity. I thought he looked unhappy," she said.

John followed the two doctors downstairs into the living-room. He saw Mary Sanders vanishing from it, fugitive as a shadow. Lacey was speaking.

"Of course there's no doubt about the rightness of Dr. Wills's diagnosis. Puerperal Septicæmia. We only call it 'Puerperal,' because she's just had a child, and that is the breach in the walls through which the invasion has come. A massive invasion too. As you both of you know quite well, the fact of her just having had a child has weakened the defences—her 'resistance,' as they're beginning to call it."

"What more can we do?" John asked.

"Nothing more than you're doing. The germs, whatever they may be, are not localized. They're in the blood-stream, and you know we can't get at that, John. Her body's a battlefield; a scene of gigantic slaughter: millions falling on either side in an equal struggle. Of course we can help, in our feeble way, by supporting her strength. The pulse and the temperature will tell you how the battle is going. There's the faintest whisper of friction at the base of the left lung—the heart-sounds mask it, but it's there. We'll hope that won't develop. But the fight is hers, not ours, John. You know that as well as I do. And she means to win if she can: there's more in the power of will than is generally realized."

He paused. Old Wills was gravely, stupidly nodding his head.

"But what worries me still," Lacey said, "is the

question of where this infection came from. It may not make much difference, but I want to know. Who gave the anæsthetic?"

"Dr. Bradley," Wills put in thankfully.

"Just cast your mind back to that day, John. What cases had you visited that morning?"

"Nothing very remarkable. Just the ordinary, commonplace round."

"You came in rather late," Wills reminded him.

"Yes, I was called back on my way home to a new case of scarlet fever."

"Scarlet fever?" Lacey said quickly. "And you came straight on here and gave her the anæsthetic? Now we know where we are." He walked to and fro in silence. "As I said before, it really makes no difference. It's her battle, not ours. If you want me again, John, you only need send for me. Good-bye, my dear fellow."

There was no accusation in his eyes. He held out his hand and smiled. John clasped it, but could not speak. At the moment he hardly knew what he was doing. As Lacey had said, the source of the infection made no difference. It was Clara's battle, not theirs. But his hand had struck the first blow.

Wills, seeing his pitiful state, was quick to console him.

"You know, Bradley," he said, "this is all my eye, you take my word for it. These young consultants are so damned cock-sure: they think they know everything.

Scarlet fever, indeed! What next? I've been in practice for nearly forty years, and I reckon I know what I'm talking about. This is as typical a case of Puerperal Fever as ever I've seen, or I'll eat my hat. Think no more about it."

Think no more about it. He could think of nothing else. The only thing he could do in this agony of self-reproach for his ignorance—there was no question of carelessness, thank God!—was to throw his practice aside and devote himself to Clara. He wired to the agents in North Bromwich to send him a locum tenens immediately. He came, a sluggish and slovenly old man, whose breath smelt of whisky. The Sanders's, out of the kindness of their hearts, put him up and fed him.

For five days John Bradley kept his station at Clara's side and watched that desperate struggle. At night, when her temperature rose, she was often delirious, her mind wandering backward and losing itself in mazes of disconnected memory. She was at Worcester, in the cathedral, listening to *The Messiah*. She laughed as she heard the spinsterly sopranos proclaiming that unto them a child was born, while the basses growled: "Wonderful . . . Wonderful!" She was talking to Matthew: "How can you speak to your mother like that?" Her lips trembled; tears flooded her eyes. And then once again, in an agony of terror, she cried out: "Don't. . . . Don't. . . . You'll hurt him!"

In the interval between these outbursts she muttered unintelligibly. Though he strained his ears he could not catch what she said or guess where her mind was wandering; and when she emerged from delirium, she was strangely calm and sweet. Her exhausted brain had no strength for speech. She lay quietly with her burning hand in his, content to gaze at him without speaking. Her eyes were full of love and tender compassion, for she knew how he suffered. But she did not know what made him suffer most.

On the tenth day of her illness her temperature suddenly fell. The long battle was lost or won, but little life was left in her. They whipped up the stumbling heart with stimulants. Lacey, hurriedly summoned, dashed down in his motor-car. He had few words to say. His eyes said what John knew already.

"She wants to see our boy, Matthew," John said.

"Yes. . . . You'd better send for him at once."

Mary Sanders offered to go to Brunston and bring Matthew back with her.

They arrived, with Janet Medhurst, by the last train from North Bromwich. An hour and five minutes too late.

(VII)

As he sat there, dreaming over the fire, there came into Dr. Bradley's mind the vision of a printed page

which he had glanced at a few weeks before: a long article in the *British Medical Journal* on the latest methods of treating Puerperal Septicæmia. Some German, it seemed—it was always the Germans in these days—had compounded a new synthetic drug with a chemical formula that meant nothing to him, now marketed under the name of Prontosil—a drug which, like Ehrlich's Salvarsan, attacked the germs of the disease in the blood-stream, the living tissues, pursued them, and slew them. Puerperal Fever, the author claimed, had been conquered and would soon be a thing of the past: a medical curiosity instead of a mortal scourge. Dr. Bradley had glanced through the article and jotted down the drug's name in his diary, because he could not trust his mind to remember it. There was no end to the marvels that chemists discovered in these days: if they went on at this rate there would soon be no maladies left for a doctor to deal with.

But Prontosil, so far as he was concerned, had been discovered exactly thirty-five years too late.

CHAPTER NINE

(I)

DR. BRADLEY reflected on Death, Dissolution, and Bereavement.

He neither pitied the dead nor yet did he envy them. He had consorted with death so closely, watched death in so many guises—as the sudden destroyer, striking swift as a lightning-flash, as the stealthy hunter, ruthlessly stalking its unconscious prey; as the angel whose benevolence brought rest to weariness and surcease to pain—that its aspect no longer appalled him. He had seen death come to more men and women than he could number—to some who had died in the sure hope of immortality and fortified by the rites of a mystical creed; to others, like himself, distrustful of speculation, devoid, by their nature, of precise religious convictions or faith in any supernal guidance beyond the dictates of conscience; to believers and infidels; to young and old; to good and bad—yet never, in all his long life, had he watched beside an unhappy death-bed. In the article of death, pain, hope, terror, remorse—even love and hatred—were abandoned, sank into insignificance, lost their validity. All death, as he had seen and known it, was Euthanasia.

In his youth he had shrunk from death—he did not shrink from death now—but even in youth he had never feared it: as reasonably might a man fear the nescience of dreamless sleep, or the profounder nullity of anæsthesia—wherein consciousness (which was what he conceived of as life) ceased to be, in which, for an instant terrifying to all but the patient, even the heart itself might stop beating and the body on the table become no more than a conglomeration of cells, each blindly living on of itself, having no more continuity with the organism it helped to compose than the twitching severed tail of a lizard or the epithelium of hairs that continued to grow in a dead man's beard.

Immortality of the soul? That was a matter on which he himself had never been tempted to speculate: the concept of a vague (and a natural enough) aspiration given shape—given, indeed, a bewildering diversity of shapes—by the makers of mystical religions. His mind—a limited mind, maybe—had no room for mysticism. It was a pragmatistical mind, matured in an age whose gods were Darwin and Huxley, Mr. Lacey's friends; established in the faith that interest in anything which had no practical bearing on life as he saw it was unprofitable; proudly confident in the ability of "modern science" to retrieve from the dust-heaps of superstition all ponderable, measurable facts worth weighing or measuring, and to accept its verdicts.

He had no desire himself for Immortality. He

believed that the soul which survived, if survival were granted, would have no more relation to life as he knew and loved it than the inconsequent changeling whose antics offended his waking reason in dreams. Shortly after Clara's death, when sheer desolation had driven him to clutch at anything that offered a semblance of stability (outside those mystical religions, over which "modern science" forbade him to waste his time or emotions) he had explored the transactions of the Society for Psychological Research. Encouraged by the fact that such "modern scientists" as Lodge and Crookes had given its methods their approval, he had read Myers's *Phantasms of the Living* and *Human Personality* and the more critical works of Podmore, whose scepticism suggested that here, at least, was a man whose hankerings after the unknown had not stampeded his imagination or unbalanced his judgment.

Yet when he came to sorting the jig-saw puzzle of the Piper-Verrall cross-correspondences, to examining reports of things said by mediums at séances or scrawled by automatic writers, it seemed to him that the realm from which these emanated, whether it belonged to this world or another, was not merely frivolous but offensive to the dignity of reason. If he must be compelled to survive in that limbo of riddling nightmares, to be lost in that babel of mischievous sub-human voices, amid which not even Plato or Goethe (except in quotation) spoke sense, he felt he would rather die for good and be done with it. And he felt

he would rather that those he loved should not survive. If such were their fated company, then, truly, death would be terrible.

The sting of Death was not for the dead but for the living—in their spiritual desolation, their loss of bodily companionship; in the frustration of hope; in the bitterness of regret—sometimes, alas! of remorse. And the Victory of the Grave was over the living too: not over the beloved body whose beauty Death had wrecked and disfigured, which would be given unto corruption, but over the living eyes that witnessed this final brutality. If he had had as much sense of the fitness of things at the time when Clara died as he had now, he would never have sanctioned the outrage of allowing Matthew to stand with his puzzled, white face beside him at the grave, or allowed himself, in his distracted bewilderment, to authorize the macabre formalities of a Victorian funeral: the black gloves, the vast ebony hearse, the long-tailed black horses, the bored “mutes,” paid by the hour, the train of musty four-wheelers; he would not have permitted the undertaker to buzz in and out of the house like a busy blowfly and instruct him, sententiously, where the chief mourner should stand and how he should behave.

Let the dead bury their dead . . . That word was divine indeed, and like His other greater simplicities forgotten. In a Christian civilization, Dr. Bradley told himself, it might someday, perhaps, be remembered, and the horror of funeral pomps—with their pagan

insistence on the perishable flesh, their forgetting the immortal spirit in which Christians believed—be recognized as the affront they were to death's dignity. What was needed, he thought, was a sanitary service, cheap, swift, efficient, impersonal, whose duty it would be to get the whole sorry business over as quickly as possible without harrowing the feelings of those who mourned or exhibiting their woe to vulgar eyes gloating, at their expense, over a costly spectacle, and admiring the "floral tributes" . . .

But when his wife died, there had been no room in John Bradley's mind for these things or for anything else. They did as they willed with him. Nothing mattered to him any longer. There was no reason, it seemed, why he should continue to exist, why the world, through which as a blind man he walked, should exist any longer. The light of his life had gone out. He was alone in the dark.

(II)

Yet even that period of stupefaction, Dr. Bradley thought, had been kind compared with the time, a little later, when feeling began to come back gradually, like the ache which returns to a broken limb when the effects of the anæsthetic under which it has been set wear off. Then, only then, with a brain no longer numbed, could he appreciate his irreparable loss, the

finality of a desolation in which—so obstinate is habit—he still found it difficult to believe. That was the blackest hour of all his life. It was one of the blessings of old age that he could recall and re-live it now—not, indeed, without emotion, but without actual pain, regarding the agony he had suffered objectively, rather as though it had been endured by someone else. As, in truth, it had.

The bitterest element in that cup, the one whose taste he could never disguise or forget, was the conviction that he himself had carried to Clara's bedside the germs that killed her. He had acted in no unusual way. A doctor was compelled to spend part of his life in contact with infectious diseases; but, unless what Lacey called his "resistance" was lowered, he was generally immune from them himself and practically never carried them home to his family. In the ordinary way there would have been no risk whatever in passing from a case of scarlatina to the administration of an anæsthetic. It was only that he had failed to reckon with the exaggerated susceptibility of the woman in childbed to septic infections of all kinds. It was a matter not of carelessness but of ignorance on his part. Was ignorance a crime? Should men be punished so heavily for their ignorance? Whether they should or should not be punished, they undoubtedly were. Ignorance of the law of the land was no valid plea; ignorance of the law of nature no better.

Lacey himself, stern in most things, had charitably

glossed over his error. Wills would not even admit its existence. He pooh-poohed Lacey's theory. Consultants—especially young ones—had to maintain their reputation for superlative acuteness and omniscience. In his own opinion, the incidence of Puerperal Fever was a matter of luck; neither he nor John had anything with which to reproach themselves. Just so, John remembered, had the pre-Listerian surgeons regarded Hospitalism. Wills could not persuade or console him. He was condemned, he thought, to carry this burden of secret remorse to the grave.

And yet, by degrees, it grew lighter. It was a merciful circumstance that during this dreadful period he was kept hard at work, so engrossed in the troubles of others that he had no time to brood on his own. He was amazed and heartened, again, by discovering that he had so many friends in Sedgebury; touched and overwhelmed with unexpected kindness and sympathy. His patients (and other men's patients, too) consoled with him in conventional words which, for all that, were not common, seeing that they knew no others. His heart warmed towards these inarticulate folk who made his sorrow their own. He listened to their awkward condolences with tears in his eyes.

"I shall never get over it," he told them.

And the wisdom of garnered experience replied: "Ay, one feels like that, doctor, nobody knows that better nor me; but it's wonderful what Time will do."

Time soon blunted the edge of agony: but not even Time could mitigate the loneliness of the long summer evenings, the solitary nights. At first, when the memories that haunted him were well-nigh intolerable, he had decided to sell the house and the practice forthwith and leave Sedgebury for good; yet always some unforeseen circumstance had prevented him from putting his resolve into practice: the immediate illness of some favourite patient whom he would not like to surrender to a stranger's care; a confinement, which he knew might be hazardous, booked for a date far ahead. These "difficult" people had taken him to their hearts; they were dependent on him and trusted him; it would be weak and ignoble to desert them for selfish reasons.

He put off going from month to month. In the end it seemed easier to stay on in Sedgebury than to leave it. He fell back on the solace of the chosen companions of his boyhood, books and green fields. Since the day when he became a medical student he had found little time for either. Now, reluctant to face the lonely darkness of his bedroom, he sat up late reading. There were hardly any books in the house save those he had brought in "Dr." Mortimore's sea-chest from Lesswardine. Occasionally, spurred on by the talk of tea-parties, Clara had bought a new "thrilling" novel by Hall Caine or Marie Corelli; but her interests, apart from her music, had all been practical. There was no bookshop in Sedgebury, no library nearer than North

Bromwich. For the choice and supply of his reading he had to rely on Mary Sanders.

Up till now he had shared Clara's attitude of regarding—and treating—Mary Sanders as a child. Hardly a day passed in which she did not visit them; their house was almost as much her home as her father's terra-cotta villa over the way, whose rawness quick-growing poplars and shrubberies of laurel were now fortunately concealing. Mary was more at ease in their company, Clara had said, than in that of her father and mother, who, generous and kindly as they were, had little in common with her. In this delightful intimacy, which was that of two youngish parents and a precociously grown-up daughter, John had found more joy than he realized until he missed it. For now that there was no longer another woman in the house, Mary hardly came there save when she hurriedly brought or retrieved the books she lent him.

John Bradley resented this. Their affection had been established on such a platonic basis that it never ever entered his mind that her unchaperoned visits might be considered improper.

"I never see you now, Mary," he said, "and when you do come you rush away before I've had time to look at you. Won't you stay for a moment and talk to me?"

Sometimes she took pity on him and stayed for a

while; but even then he saw that she was uneasy and had to let her go.

"Why don't you come over to supper this evening?" she said. "Dad and mother were saying only last night that you'd quite deserted them lately. Emma can easily bring over any message that comes. What's more, I don't think it's good for you to go on night after night sitting there all alone."

He laughed at her proprietary air. "Don't you really, Mary? Well, if you say so it must be right, so, of course, I'll obey you."

He began to spend many of his evenings in the Sanders's house—not because he felt really at home there (it could never be "liveable," as Clara had said) but because going there was his only means of enjoying Mary's society. She was never shy with him—their familiarity was too long established for that—nor was there at any time any hint of a romantic relationship. Yet in those evenings, while the silent Mrs. Sanders knitted and her husband snored in his easy chair, the quality of the intimacy between him and Mary changed. John Bradley was astonished to find how little he knew of her, how much more there was to know. Clara, no doubt, had been partly responsible for that. Though the two women were friends, she had been so much the elder that Mary had always tactfully kept herself in the background, subordinating her interests to Clara's, which were narrower and of a different kind.

Now, released from this social obligation, she began to express herself, and was as grateful for the opportunity as was John, who received her confidences. He had suffered for years, without consciously regretting it, from the lack of any intellectual companionship of the kind which he had enjoyed, all too briefly, in the first flush of his friendship with Lacey. Books, pictures, the loftier expressions of human thought or imagination—all those things which gave to the atmosphere of the Laceys' Alvaston house its peculiar richness—had had no possible place in Clara's concrete mind. She had been first of all an exceedingly competent housewife, and next a mother; then both, with the maternal passion predominating. He had loved her so much for herself that he asked nothing more of her; the sharing of her interests, together with his work, was sufficient for him. But now she was gone, and nothing left in her place, he asked more of life. He found it in Mary Sanders.

She too—even more than he, for her days were more empty than his—had felt the stultification of existence in Sedgebury. She had been educated at an expensive school and "finished" at another in Paris, where things gracious and shapely were regarded as the normal background to the life of a cultured and leisured class. She still "kept up" her music—Clara had helped her in that—and went into North Bromwich occasionally for concerts. She had all the books that she wanted, too: Aaron Sanders was always ready

to foot her booksellers' bills, and glad to boast of the number of volumes she bought and the "brass" he had paid for them. But her books had afforded her, at the best, a solitary joy—until Clara Bradley died and, freed from the inhibition imposed by her unsympathetic eyes, she began to share it with John.

In dismissing her from his thoughts as a child—"her little friend from over the way," as Clara called her—John Bradley had underestimated the quality and maturity of Mary's mind. He had considered himself, with Clara's encouragement, a fair sample, in education, of the average professional man in the North Bromwich district. It was not until his mind clashed with Mary's that he realized his limitations. Even in general subjects in which he had imagined himself to be moderately well-equipped, her reading had been as wide as his, while in the work of the great English poets, novelists and essayists—the whole province of imaginative literature—she had explored tracts of territory of which he had not even heard. (She hadn't read Hakluyt: that was "one up" to him!)

"But John," she would cry (he was no longer "Dr. Bradley"), "if you don't know that, of course I must lend it to you: you'll enjoy it so much."

The books she lent him were as different from the Hall Caines and Corellis which had caught Clara's momentary enthusiasm as the piratical works in "Dr." Mortimore's sea-chest. Though he had seen in the

theatre (those were the days of Irving) and read a number of Shakespeare's plays, he had never encountered the Sonnets, while of the poetry of the Romantic Revival—Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley—he knew nothing save the set pieces recited by children. He knew something of Dickens and Thackeray, but nothing at all of the Brontës or of Jane Austen, Mary's own particular idol, and he had never even heard of George Meredith or of Hardy, whose *Jude*—a character whose early history in some small ways resembled his own—had been published in the year of his qualification. He was acquainted with a little of Tennyson, but with nothing of Browning or Swinburne. This Shropshire lad had read no poem by Housman, whose birthplace lay within six miles of his surgery doorstep.

He took her books home with him to the lonely house. He read them not merely for their own sake—some, indeed, bewildered him—but because their contents were already part of her mind, and the understanding of this mind, so fresh, so limpid, so much more subtle than his own, was a pursuit that fascinated him. Sometimes, in turns, they read poetry aloud. He preferred Mary to read to him, for her voice in speaking was sweeter to him than when she sang: she loved words for themselves, and when they were lovely it seemed to caress them. His own voice was deep and harsh, as he thought; when he read it went lower and lower; for the beauty of words, which he

had hardly appreciated at all before these days, affected him strangely. His late sufferings had left his emotions too near the surface. There were moments when, as it seemed for no reason, tears came to his eyes and he could speak no more.

One evening, in mid-July, they were reading Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*. In his turn he came to the poem called "Two in the Campagna." He found himself reading:

"I would that you were all to me,
 You that are just so much, no more,
 Not yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
 Where does the fault lie? What the core
 O' the wound, since wound must be?"

I would I could adopt your will,
 See with your eyes, and set my heart
 Beating by yours . . ."

His voice trembled. He stopped.

"Go on," she said softly.

He shook his head and closed the book. He dared not look at her. There came a long silence.

"All right," she said gently, "we'd better not read any more to-night."

(III)

A week later Matthew came home for the summer holidays, and there were no more of those readings. For the boy's sake as much as for his own, John Bradley had dreaded Matthew's return to the desolate house. He did not know his son: that was the truth of the matter, and the terminal report from Brunston, which arrived on the day of Matthew's coming, added little to his knowledge.

Headmaster's Report: Highly-strung and difficult.

Has evidently felt and still feels the shock of his recent bereavement very deeply.

Housemaster's Report: Concur with the above. Conduct, on the whole, satisfactory. Certain tendencies should be watched.

("What tendencies?" John wondered. "Why can't the fellow speak plainly?")

Form-master's Report: Has done fairly well this term, but could do better if he chose to work.

John Bradley smiled. How solemnly they all wrote about the poor little devil! His first task must be to eliminate the ridiculous antagonism which had been allowed to develop between himself and Matthew. (How would Matthew feel if he knew that his father, unwittingly, had been the instrument

of his mother's death?) There were no reasons for it that he could see, and many against it. What could be more natural than that they should cling to one another? Each had lost the only person he loved; each, but for the other, was now alone in the world. Yet he dreaded the awkwardness of their first meeting. He was frightened of the child.

And not without reason. He had not set eyes on Matthew since, unseeing, they had stood together on the brink of Clara's grave. The change in the boy astonished him. Although he was only fifteen, Matthew no longer seemed a child. His voice had broken; the hobbledehoy had shot up to within a few inches of his father. John Bradley felt proud of this slim and shapely youth whom he had begotten of the woman he loved. Though, before, he had found it difficult to share Clara's pride, and regretted, indeed, that the boy was not liker to her than to himself, he was no longer sorry that Matthew outwardly resembled him: this likeness might mean that his nature had become more understandable; and he was determined to understand it, not only being flattered by the prospect of renewing his own youth in Matthew's, but also realizing that they could help one another. His heart yearned for affection, and it pleased him to think that, armed with the wisdom of experience, he could make the boy's early manhood happier than his own.

Mary Sanders had met Matthew at the station: there had been every probability of John being out on

his round when the train came in, and both of them were anxious that the boy's holidays should not be marred by the impression of a lonely arrival. When she saw that John had come home, she left Matthew to him as soon as he reached the doorstep. This was a meeting on which her delicacy urged her not to intrude. John heard their steps and called after her, but she did not return. He watched Matthew enter the room—saw his eyes move quickly over its contents from the closed piano to Clara's work-basket. That glance hurt him: he knew what it meant. Then he said with forced heartiness:

"Hello, Matthew . . . so there you are!"

"Yes, father." His son did not move. John Bradley advanced and took him by the shoulders and kissed him. He had a shy feeling, even as he did so, that the kiss was not welcome—perhaps only because it came as a surprise; but the emotion that inspired and accompanied the gesture thawed the ice of his shyness; it was no longer so difficult for him to speak.

"This is a sad home-coming for you, my dear," he said, "and I know how you'll feel it. But you aren't really alone in that, Matthew: I feel it with you—I believe I feel it as deeply. We both loved her more dearly than anything on earth; both our lives have been broken and somehow or other we've got to make new ones—you particularly, you know, because there's so much of yours before you. And it will be easier for both of us, won't it, if we try to help each other to

rebuild them together? Remember I love you—though a father's love, of course, is different from a mother's. You're very dear to me, dearer than you can guess, for her sake as well as for your own, and I want . . . well, I want you to feel you can talk to me just as you talked to her. Will you try to do that, Matthew?"

The boy murmured: "Yes, I'll try." Whether sullenly or merely shyly, John could not decide. His heart was too full for reasoned thought. Tears dimmed his eyes. There were none in Matthew's.

Yet, after that first, that almost unbearable evening when they faced one another on either side of the desolate supper-table, Matthew fulfilled his part of the bargain loyally, though John saw that it was not easy for him. They were still strangers. Considering how Clara had absorbed the boy, and he her, that was hardly to be wondered at. There was, moreover, in Matthew, as in his grandfather, a native strain of wild, shy taciturnity, which only his passionate devotion to Clara had relaxed and which the loss of her had intensified. John could see how much the boy suffered from every reminder of that loss. He had been through that dreadful experience himself and was able to sympathize. He wished he could make his son realize this, but knew that speech was more dangerous to the emotions of both of them than silence. There were hours when they sat together in the evening without exchanging a word: Matthew fastened eagerly on

Mary Sanders's books; he would sit reading, his black brows knitted, and then, of a sudden, throw the book aside and begin to play the piano. At times John, listening, had the illusion that Clara was playing. At times she seemed oddly near. And all the time, in spite of Matthew's reserve, John rejoiced to feel they were growing nearer one another; that he was beginning to be accepted by his son as a companion, however inadequate, rather than as a parent. This gave him great joy, for he was by nature affectionate, and he believed that Matthew, as well as himself, was made happier.

The great thing was to keep the boy busy. Mary Sanders, with whom John had discussed the matter, helped him in this. In his home life Matthew had been used to a woman's society: Mary saw to it that the change to a bachelor establishment should not be too abrupt. She walked with him, rode with him, read to him, played duets with him. She did far more than that. It was her influence, John believed, more than anything else, that acted as a flux in uniting their unlike if not incompatible metals; and she had a sense of humour of a kind that Clara had lacked; she teased them impartially, refusing to take sides and treating both the man and the boy as if they were children who owed obedience to her maternal authority.

There were, fortunately, other diversions to keep Matthew from brooding. The Martyn girls, with whom, as a child, he had played at Miss Pidgeon's

kindergarten, had shot up into young ladies. At their home there was no lack of youthful society. Any young male who could dance and play tennis and go picnicking with them was welcome at Silver Street. Matthew was soon adopted and made free of this charming household whose Irish inconsequences and its air of perpetual holiday made short work with his shyness. All her children, as Mrs. Martyn declared, were as mad as March hares. Their high spirits attracted gay company which made Silver Street an oasis in the cindery waste of the expanding Sedgebury. The Martyns had no money to speak of—bad cess to it!—but they always enjoyed themselves amid surroundings which, in spite of their shabbiness, still suggested a life of easy circumstance in an Irish gentleman's home in the depths of the country, where the daughters of the house made the beds and “washed up” the tea-things, but the table was always set with Crown Derby and Queen Anne silver, and a Waterford decanter of vintage port went round (with the sun) after dinner. Silver Street was always full of tall, flannelled young men, the friends of the son of the house, who rode over to play tennis, to eat raspberries and cream, to sip Mr. Martyn's port and dance by candlelight. Vivien Hingston would sometimes bring over a party from Stourford. Edward Willis from Mawne had his sombre eye, it was said, on Sheila. There were two Dakers boys, one a Cambridge cricket-blue and the other a medical student. Occasionally

subalterns brought the aroma of "honey and flowers" from the regimental depot in Worcester. The Martyn girls danced and flirted impartially with all of them. They were kindly disposed to Matthew and danced with him too, not because he contributed much to their parties, but because he lived near and was presentable and always available and had lost his mother, poor child. "Rather a pretty little woman, and almost a lady," Mrs. Martyn said. Mary Sanders was not invited to Silver Street. One must draw the line somewhere.

But Mary was always his first friend, his chosen companion, and John Bradley was doubly blest in this: because Matthew's presence encouraged her to come to the house which she had so long deserted, and because it seemed to him that her fondness for Matthew (and his for her) were helping to make good the boy's loss and supplying, in a way, an influence that was even healthier than that of the fierce, possessive passion Clara had displayed.

Since the night when they had read Browning together, he was aware that the relationship between Mary and himself had changed. He could no longer pretend to himself that he was not in love with her, and he believed that she knew it. Nothing other than this could account for the tension which, even when Matthew was with them, made the atmosphere vaguely emotional. He had found it hard at first to reconcile this new-born love with his duty towards

Clara's memory. When Clara was alive it had certainly not existed: he had been utterly and exclusively devoted to her. What would she think—even more, he asked himself, what would "people" think—if they knew he had changed his devotions so easily and so swiftly? What "people" thought—though it would certainly have troubled her, poor darling!—did not trouble him seriously. "People," although they might snigger for a day or two over this latest example of the frailty of human affections, were, in the main, sufficiently reasonable to admit that a normal man in his forty-first year was not made for celibacy, that his choice was good and that it would be ungenerous not to wish him happiness.

What would Clara think? It was a question so wildly hypothetical as to be hardly worth answering; yet he felt he must answer it. And here, too, his conscience was clear. Mary Sanders had always been her most intimate friend; Clara had even encouraged him in enjoying Mary's society. And if Clara were capable of thought, he could guess where her thoughts would be: they would be centred on Matthew rather than on himself; her first regret, in this brutal severance, would be the fact that Matthew was deprived of a mother's care; she would distrust (and how unreasonably!) the capacity of a hard-worked widower to give their child, this "difficult" child, the tenderness and understanding that he deserved and needed. John could not help feeling in his heart that Clara would

approve of the results of his marrying Mary more strongly than she would dislike his apparent infidelity. Janet was still tied to Jacob Medhurst and unavailable. Clara would agree that it was his duty to re-marry for Matthew's sake. There was no woman in the world whom she would rather he married than Mary Sanders.

What would Mary think? He dismissed that question abruptly. He believed he knew what she thought. The only point that might trouble her (or her parents) was the disparity in their ages. A man was as old as he felt, people said; a woman as old as she looked. If these sayings were true, the marriage would not be incongruous.

What would Matthew think . . . ?

The only question remaining: the most doubtful, the most important. Though he felt he was beginning to know Matthew better, the boy's inmost thoughts were still hidden from him; but there was no longer, thank heaven, any sense of hidden antagonism. When John put his arm round him and kissed him good night, Matthew did not shrink as he had shrunk from that kiss of welcome. There were moments, indeed, of true and delightful companionship, when they talked and laughed together over the small events of the day; moments of silent communion, even more serene, when Matthew with furrowed brows sat reading and John Bradley smoked his after-dinner pipe. He would sit gazing at Matthew, with a proud and leisurely sense of

possession which had pity and tenderness in it as well as love; thinking how goodly it was to be young and healthy—a boy on his summer holidays, with no thought for the morrow; wondering what the future held for him, thinking, perhaps, that when the day for more serious decisions came (it might come in a few years now) Matthew might make up his mind, as he hoped he would, to become a doctor and join him in practice, and follow on in his place when his own time was done. And then, suddenly conscious of his father's gaze, the boy would look up from his book to meet it and smile with a smile that, oddly enough, had something of Clara's in it. There was no fear, no suspicion, no reserve in Matthew's eyes now. The period of uncertainty was over. He felt they were friends, and by their community of blood even more than friends.

It was a remarkable and, as John thought, an encouraging thing that the presence of Mary Sanders strengthened rather than disturbed this new and happy relationship. It supplied the one element that was missing. When she was with them they presented the proper picture of the domestic trinity: man, woman and child. Matthew was always eager to include her in their pleasures. Often, when they had planned to go for a walk or make cycling expeditions farther afield, he would ask anxiously if Mary was coming with them. They would walk ahead of John, their arms interlaced. Matthew shared with her secrets which he would not

confide to his father. All good omens—and yet, in some ways, the boy was still so incalculable that John Bradley hesitated to open his heart to him.

He could not, he told himself, put off the moment of confession indefinitely. Life was short—only too damnably short. He was nearly forty-one: less than half of man's allotted span remained to him. Every day he was falling more deeply in love with Mary, and he could not believe that Mary did not know it. He felt that the strain of an unconfessed passion was telling on both of them. He noticed that she had grown paler and more subdued; her eyes met his rarely. There were times when she seemed to seek Matthew's company rather than his, not coquettishly but because it gave her some sense of protection from her own feelings. John missed in her attitude towards him the frankness in which he had always delighted. They were both constrained by the consciousness of something unspoken. He himself, he believed, felt the irksomeness of that constraint even more than she. He was a man, and the feelings of a man, he supposed, were naturally more positive than those of a woman. It gave him a wry satisfaction, lying sleepless at night, to realize that at his age he was still capable of suffering the torments of love.

In the last week of the summer holidays the course of events forced his hand. John Bradley himself, uncunningly, had contributed to the situation by suggesting that Mrs. Sanders, who had been ill, needed

change of air. Aaron Sanders was only too pleased with any excuse for a holiday. The bicycle boom had made him a wealthy man; there seemed to be no end to the world's capacity for absorbing the products of the Jubilee Works, and it was just about time, he said, for him to begin to "take things a bit easier."

His usual idea of a holiday had been to transport the whole family to an expensive hotel "on the front" at Margate or Blackpool or Scarborough, where the air was guaranteed bracing, and to scatter as much money as he could in one lavish fortnight. This time, however, out of respect for his wife's convalescence, he was prepared to resign himself to a more sober holiday in a softer clime. Torquay attracted him—not only because it was milder but also because of a rather uncertain tradition that his forbears "came from" those parts where, his travellers told him, the family name was still common. Aaron Sanders had reached, in fact, that period in life and that degree of well-earned leisure in which a man's future, definable and limited, appears less interesting and far less romantic than his past. In the Black Country, where he had slaved all his life and made his fortune, there were no new fields to conquer. There, his social status, for all his wealth, had been fixed irrevocably, and if he tried—as some of his business friends had done—to "set up" in the neighbourhood as a country-gentleman, people would only laugh at him. In South Devon, he told himself, this desirable transformation

could be made much more easily. Nobody need know where he came from or ask how he had made his money. He could appear on the scene as a successful emigrant returning to the land of his fathers, prepared to resume the country life his forbears had forsaken and to end his days in dignity among his own folk.

It was to John Bradley alone that he confided these vague ambitions.

"You know, doctor," he said, "I'm getting on in life, and making money don't mean what it did to me. I've made all I want, and it isn't as if I'd a son to come after me. I've never let mother or Mary know what's in my mind; but when I've got them properly settled down there, I'll tell you what I shall do: I shall mooch round a bit in the car on my own and see what it feels like, and find out, if I can, the place where my people came from and where they are buried. And then, if I like it, there's no saying what I might do. If I happened to come on some nice little estate that took my fancy—not too big, mind: I wouldn't want more than fifty or sixty acres—I might buy it and settle down there. I don't want to make any splash. You know that's not in my nature. But I do feel that living in Sedgebury, now there's no further need for it, is a bit rough on our Mary. I've given her all the advantages money can buy, and what is the use of them? She's a cut above all the folk she's ever likely to meet here. Apart from your poor

dear wife and yourself she's never had any society, you might say, of the kind she's suited to. All the money I've spent on her has been wasted, in a manner of speaking, and I should like to see her getting the benefit of it and settling down in the place she's entitled to while I'm still alive. I'm telling you all this in confidence, mind. If I let mother know I was thinking of any such thing there'd be all sorts of ructions. She's a home-bird if ever there was one, and don't I know it! You should have seen the trouble I had moving her when we built Jubilee House! You'd have thought I was taking her to Siberia!"

John Bradley received these confidences with a sinking heart. The mere thought of Mary's being away for a month had already depressed him; the prospect, however indefinite, of losing her altogether was more than he could bear. There was one consolation: Matthew shared in his disappointment.

"I do think," he declared in his sublime schoolboy egotism, "Mary might have put off going away until the 'hols' were over. She promised faithfully to ride to Worcester and go over the cathedral next week. I'd been looking forward to that."

"Well, never mind: we'll go just the same," John told him.

"But it won't be the same without Mary. I think it's just rotten—particularly now that all the Martyns have gone to Ireland."

Indeed it would not be the same without Mary . . .

On the evening before the Sanders's departure she came over to supper. It was an uncomfortable meal. Matthew made no attempt to disguise his resentment at her defection. John was poignantly aware of the tension in the atmosphere between her and himself, of the hollowness of her affected gaiety. Suppressed emotion heightened her beauty. There was a new tenderness in her eyes; her lips, when she smiled, were faintly tremulous. She had never seemed nearer to him or more remote. She was at such pains to conceal what she felt—what they both were feeling—that she made herself more elusive than usual, avoiding all looks or speech that might betray it, devoting herself, with conscious deliberateness, to Matthew; behaving, almost, as if John were not there—or, at least, were of no importance. During all the evening he scarcely exchanged a word with her, though his heart was full of words which it was hard to contain. After supper Matthew and she played duets. John sat and watched them, hearing nothing of what they played, possessed and distracted by the turbulence of unspoken thoughts. Indeed something of that imprisoned emotion must have escaped him and reached her, for her fingers stumbled and suddenly, in the middle of a page, she lost her place.

"What on earth's the matter with you to-night?" Matthew asked her sternly.

"I don't know. I'm dreadfully sorry, darling. Let's try again. We'll start here—at the top."

But once more, half-way through the movement, she lost herself and threw up her hands.

"It's no good," she said. "I simply can't play this evening. My fingers won't work. I expect it's an uneasy conscience: I was up late last night, and we've had such a rush to-day that I haven't even been able to finish my packing. What time is it, John?"

"A quarter to ten."

"Then, I really must go. We have to start early to-morrow. The trains are so awkward that it will take us six hours to get to Torquay. Ridiculous, isn't it?"

She rose hurriedly, kissing Matthew good-bye, then held out her hand to John.

"I'll take you over the road," he said.

"Oh, please don't bother . . . I shall have to run as it is."

"Very well." Ignoring her outstretched hand he took her by the shoulders and kissed her. He had never kissed her before.

"Good-bye, John," she whispered, and quickly turned, and was gone.

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(iv)

Gone with her, too, were his joy in life and all life's beauty.

Matthew seemed almost as deeply bereft by the loss of his playmate and confidante as John Bradley himself. For the next few days he was listless and bored and at a loose end, which, seeing that he had neither Mary nor the Martyns to keep him company, was not to be wondered at. John did what he could to keep him amused during the scanty hours of leisure the practice allowed him; but the boy made it clear that his company could not be regarded as an adequate substitute for Mary's (or even for the Martyns')—that he was too old, too inelastic, perhaps even a little too stupid, quite apart from the fact of his being, however unwillingly, the sole wielder of repressive parental authority. The distance between them widened. It seemed as though all the new-won intimacy on which John had lately prided himself had only been brought about, after all, by Mary's company. Though this unflattering conclusion hurt him, it had compensations, suggesting, in fact, a fortunate identity in the dictates of duty and inclination; assuring him that it was only by making Mary Sanders his wife that he could do justice to Matthew's happiness. He had already lost too much valuable time over doubts and scruples of conscience. Now, convinced that he saw the way clear to the happiness of all three of them, he determined to take his courage in his hands—to write to her—writing was easier than speech—and ask her to marry him.

One night in the middle of the week, when Matthew

had gone yawning to bed after a session of bored silence, he made his way to the consulting-room and sat down at his desk.

My dearest Mary (he wrote),

Perhaps this letter may come as a surprise to you, though somehow I don't think it will; but whether it does or doesn't I have to write it. Can you imagine, I wonder, how desolate we both have been, Matthew and I, since you left us the other evening? Well, here we are, anyway, the two of us, like a couple of lost souls, and the silence is more than I can bear, so I have to break it. You know that I love you, my dearest. If you didn't know before—as I'm almost sure you did—you must surely have known when I kissed you good-bye last Monday. I want you to marry me. Those are really the only important words in this letter and I can hardly live till you answer them; but there are a number of other things I feel I must say because . . . well, because I'm so desperately anxious for you to understand everything before you do answer.

This isn't anything new. I suppose I began to love you months ago when you took such sweet pity on my loneliness. You were the only glimmer of light or of hope I could see in that darkness: it was only because of you that I came to see any reason for living; and the moment when first I knew what you meant to me came—I wonder if you remember?—on that evening when we were reading Browning together. After that

I knew I should have to love you for ever. If I had been really natural and candid I should have told you I loved you then; but the thing overawed me: I simply hadn't the courage, and in any case, as I think you know, I'm a very shy man. I went home bewildered and shaken. I shall never find words in which to tell you the doubts that troubled me that night.

First of all, my age. I had always looked on you as a child. When I saw you first you were a child—you were only nineteen, and I was a married man of twenty-nine, a good bit older than my years. Now I'm over forty and you're nearly thirty, and the difference between us doesn't seem quite so great. Do you think of me as a middle-aged man? I wonder. Then another thing: I was frightened a bit, though that doesn't weigh with me now, of what people would say. It would not be considered "decent," I thought, for a man to re-marry so soon after his wife had died. That was nonsense, of course. I know it was nonsense now. But there it was. And then doubts about Matthew. I knew what a sensitive child he was and how passionately he had been attached to Clara. I couldn't guess how he would take it, and that frightened me too. I know now, thank heaven, I needn't ever have worried about him. If you could have seen how utterly lost he's been since you went away and how much he misses you, you'd realize that he needs you almost (but never quite) as much as I do.

And lastly, myself. Quite apart from my age, I

know perfectly well I'm no match for a girl like you, Mary. I'm not brilliant in any way, and, compared with you, I'm uneducated. Any education I have I've managed to pick up for myself in spare moments snatched from a working life that began when I was fourteen. I've no "future" either. I've got to the point where I am more or less by the skin of my teeth and there's no earthly chance of my going any farther: I shall end my days, I suppose, as a humble, hard-worked general practitioner. I've no money but what I've earned and no property but the house I live in. But apart from all this, I don't think there's much more to be said against me. I'm strong and I'm healthy: I fancy I come of a pretty tough stock. As men go, I'm reasonably honest and even-tempered. And I love you, God knows, as devotedly as any man ever has loved a woman on this earth. After that there's no more I can say for myself—except that I shall find it difficult to live until you send me your answer.

He signed the paper and folded it and closed the envelope. For a long while he sat there motionless, uncertain whether it would not be better to write the letter all over again. The words he had written seemed, on reflection, confused and inadequate. He felt he had said too little; that he had protested too much; that the letter, in short, was that of a clumsy, ignorant man unused to expressing his intimate

thoughts on paper. Yet, even if he re-wrote it, he doubted if he could better it. It was too long—far too long—already. If he had felt more sure of himself he could simply have told her he loved her and asked her to marry him without any attempt at explaining himself. Perhaps that, on the whole, would have been wiser. For a moment he wavered. Yet, even as he hesitated, there returned to his mind the conviction that whether he re-wrote his letter or no, Mary Sanders would understand what he meant and forgive his clumsiness as being an essential part of the man she had known so long and so well.

So be it. . . . With the firm clerkly hand he had formed with such pains under Mr. Laxton's tuition at Lesswardine, he addressed the closed envelope and stamped it, returning to the empty sitting-room with an odd sense of triumphant elation in the fact that the doubtful die had been cast, that the thoughts which had burdened his mind so long had at length been released irrevocably and put upon paper. He would have felt even more triumphant if he had been able to post his letter that evening; but in those days the Sedgebury post-office closed at eight and no more mail would be dispatched for twenty-four hours; so he put the stamped letter on the mantelpiece and went upstairs—to sleep more soundly, indeed, than he had slept on any night since Mary's departure.

The same sense of present relief and unwarrantable confidence in the future prevailed when he woke

next day to the exhilarating freshness of a crisp September morning. On such days even men who are not in love know that life is sweet. Matthew, too, had felt the enlivenment of that golden, rime-chilled air and was down before him. As he emerged from his bath John could hear the gay notes of a Beethoven *rondo* which seemed a proper accompaniment to his own lightness of heart—a good augury, too, for the expedition to Worcester which they had planned for that day. A cheerful fire flickered on the hearth—the first of autumn.

“Isn’t it a topping morning for a ride?” Matthew said as John kissed him good morning. “There must have been frost in the night. I wonder if Mary is having weather like this at Torquay. I bet she’s wishing she was here. What time can we start, Dad?”

“As soon as I’ve finished my round. It isn’t a big one; and Dr. Harris has promised to take the evening surgery, so we can come home as late as we like. We might hire a boat at Worcester and row up towards Stourport.”

“I don’t want to miss hearing the organ in the cathedral.”

“Well, we’ll have our row in the morning and come back for evensong.”

“Yes, that’s a ripping idea. Let’s do as much as we can, Dad. If you do lots of different things in a day it makes it seem longer, doesn’t it? My word, I am hungry! Doesn’t that bacon smell good?”

"It's not quite half-past eight yet; but, if you like, you can tell Emma we're ready."

John smiled as he watched him eating his breakfast. What a splendid thing it was to be a schoolboy with the appetite of a bright September morning, with no possible care in the world, no thought for the morrow! He was happy to think how much easier and less complicated than his own Matthew's sheltered boyhood had been. He remembered Clara's concern for the boy's fancied delicacy. He wished Clara could see him now. If ever there had been anything to cause anxiety Matthew had grown out of it. His body had lost its early lankiness; health glowed in his sanguine cheeks; the sun sparkled in his clear eyes and revealed the dark down that already shadowed his upper lip. He felt proud of this splendid young animal whom he had begotten, and, in the glow of this morning's radiant mood, sublimely hopeful.

"He will be able to start," John Bradley thought, "where I left off, and to take the ambitions I shrank from in his stride. When I was his age I was nothing more than an ungainly yokel. Even to-day, at fifteen, he knows more than I knew when I came to North Bromwich. He has health, he has brains, he's already a civilized creature. All the richness of life lies open before him; he can have what he will. And when I grow old and tired and take the ease I have earned, I shall still be able to watch him with pride, and have the right to share in his triumphs because it

was I who made them possible. Yes, Mary and I will watch him together," he thought, "for she's known him since he was born and I think she loves him almost as dearly as I do: and she'll help him, too, with a wisdom and gentleness I could never give—a wisdom, perhaps, that even poor Clara could never quite have given him. We three together . . ."

Matthew's voice broke in on his musings. Matthew was standing by the mantelpiece and had picked up the fateful letter.

"Hello, Dad," he said. "What's this? You've been writing to Mary."

"Yes, I wrote her a letter last night when you'd gone to bed."

"And you've sealed up the envelope! Well, I do call that rotten. You might have shown it me. Can I see what you said?"

"No, the envelope's stamped."

"I'll address it again. It'd be rather fun to kid her it's come from me. After all, what's a penny stamp?"

"Take care of the pence . . . You know the rest. It's a lesson worth learning, too."

He laughed as he spoke; but Matthew no longer smiled. His black brows were set in a frown; his eyes narrowed, suspicious. "Good Lord, the child's actually jealous," John thought. "Well, that's all to the good: it only shows how fond he is of her." He said: "Give it me: I'll post it in Worcester. That may save time."

Matthew still held the letter. "Why don't you want me to read what you've written, Dad? Is it something about me?"

"I may have just mentioned you."

"I thought as much!"

"There's nothing to look like Hamlet about, my dear boy."

"Then why can't I see? Mary's my friend as much as yours."

"Do you usually read other people's letters, Matthew?"

"I hate people writing about me behind my back. I don't mind betting you wouldn't like it much either."

John laughed: "There's not much about you as a matter of fact."

"Then what *is* it about? Can't you tell me?"

After all, John asked himself, why shouldn't Matthew be told? He would have to know sooner or later. Better, perhaps, to break it naturally to him like this, speaking face to face, than in some bald and formal letter that would reach him a week later at Brunston and might even be misunderstood for lack of a word's explanation. After all, again, the boy was more deeply concerned in this matter than anyone else except Mary and himself. He would have the right, in a way, to be aggrieved if he felt that a secret so important were being kept from him. It would be part of this new, delightful relationship that Matthew and Mary and he should keep no secrets from one another.

"All right, then," he said at last, "if you'll try not to look so tragic, I'll tell you exactly what's in it. Come here and sit down beside me. I don't want Emma to hear every word I say, though no doubt she'd be interested."

Matthew shook his head. He did not move. His eyes, though he tried to smile, were still so wary and apprehensive that John felt sorry for him.

"You're very fond of Mary, aren't you?" he said.

"Of course I'm fond of her," Matthew answered indignantly. "You know I'm fonder of Mary than of anyone else in the world."

John was amused by his warmth and glad of it. "Including me?" he suggested, with a smile.

"Well . . . you're my father. That's different, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes . . . I suppose it is. Would you like Mary to come and live here?"

"Live here? What do you mean, Dad?"

"Just what I say: to come and live here in this house . . . for always . . . with you and me."

"But she couldn't do that, unless . . ."

"Unless we were married. Of course. That's exactly what the letter's about. I've asked Mary to marry me."

"To marry you . . . *you* . . . ?"

"Is that all you can say? Why, Matthew, I thought you'd be pleased."

He stared at the boy, aghast at the access of passion

which now transfigured his face, at the wave of hot blood that suffused it until a great vein—like Jacob Medhurst's—bulged in the middle of his forehead. Then, almost as suddenly, John saw Matthew's cheeks blanch deathly pale: there was no life left in the pallid mask but that of his eyes which, narrowed beneath their black brows, continued to stare at him with a dreadful, malevolent intensity.

"Matthew . . . Matthew . . . My dearest child! What's the matter?" he cried.

The boy did not seem to hear him. Only his limbs continued to tremble, his eyes to stare. They were strangely inhuman, like those of a cornered animal, full of fear and hatred. John's heart grew warm with bewildered pity and tenderness for this stricken creature. Was it some inexplicable torment of jealousy that so transformed him? He moved towards him, smiling, with arms outstretched to embrace. Matthew's face was still ghastly white. As his father advanced the boy hunched his shoulders and shrank away from him. Then, suddenly, a shocking thing happened. With a swift, convulsive movement he gathered himself together: his hunched shoulders went back; his right fist shot out to land with all the strength that was in him on John's defenceless mouth.

"Matthew . . . Matthew!" he cried. "Are you mad?"

He stretched out his hands to defend himself from another blow, but the boy evaded them. He had flung

himself on the sofa and lay there shaken and choked with hoarse sobs. John Bradley knelt beside him; his lips were numb and bleeding, his own eyes full of tears. He had never felt more impotent or more bewildered. He gathered Matthew's trembling body in his arms and held it fast. It lay limp and passive, all the force of blind anger spent in that one fierce blow, no longer malignant but merely childish and pitiful. John found himself muttering broken words of endearment, the words Clara had used when she fondled her son as a baby. He had forgotten his bleeding lips; there was nothing now in his mind but an overwhelming compassion and love for this wounded creature. And at length, out of sheer exhaustion, the boy shuddered and lay still.

For a long while neither of them spoke; yet John knew that some word must be spoken. He steadied his voice with difficulty.

"I had no idea you would take this so hardly, Matthew," he said.

Once more Matthew's body stiffened, and, as suddenly, relaxed.

"I'm sorry I hit you," he said, with a strange, contained coldness. "I . . . I couldn't help it."

"I know, I know," John consoled him. "Let's think no more about it. If I'd dreamt that you'd be so upset . . ."

"Oh, Dad, how could you, how *could* you . . . !" His voice was agonized.

"It was partly for your sake, Matthew."

"For *my* sake? You don't understand. You've never understood me or mother either. How could you forget her so soon if you really loved her?"

"My dear child, I haven't forgotten. I shall never forget. But, you see . . ."

"I can't see. It's horrible—utterly horrible. . . . The idea of putting somebody else in her place. And so soon. . . . I can't bear to think of it. I wish I were dead, I wish I had died like her," he cried, "before you told me. Then I shouldn't have known you could think of doing a thing like that."

He shook his head hopelessly and buried his face in his hands. John Bradley gazed at the broken child in silence. The words that came into his mind seemed empty and useless. Against the reproach of such blank desolation he had no defence. A harrowing uncertainty seized him. Had any human being the right, he asked himself, to inflict on another—above all, on one so near to him, so young and so helpless—this immeasurable pain? Had a lover's selfish casuistry persuaded him to betray the trust imposed on him by the dead woman his ignorance had destroyed? Could she, whose memory the boy had invoked, forgive this second, gratuitous injury to the child who still secretly mourned her, the child she had loved more than life? Restitution? Renunciation? It was only with these, it seemed, that he could ever discharge the debt which,

in spite of reason, still weighed on his conscience. The greater the cost, he told himself, the more just the atonement. There was even, he found, in the idea of self-sacrifice, a sort of bitter ecstasy. The boy must come first. As from a distance he heard himself speaking:

"I'm sorry, Matthew. I'd planned to do what I thought best for both of us; and I made a mistake. I'd no idea, you see, that you felt so deeply. Perhaps I was stupid not to have known, but you never helped me to know: that's a family failing—I'm rather like that myself. All the same, if I'd guessed this was going to hurt you so much . . . but I don't think I'd better try to explain any more. Some day, later on, perhaps, when you're as old as I am, you may understand what I felt and think rather better of me. You're not the only lonely one, Matthew: I'm terribly lonely too. When you go back to school at the end of the week and leave me, my loneliness will be pretty hard to bear; but that won't matter the very least, I shan't mind bearing it, if only what's happened to-day makes us understand one another a little better. I love you a great deal, Matthew—you're all I have now, you know—though a father's love, of course, is a different thing from a mother's. More than anything in the world I want to help you. But I can't possibly do that, you see, when you shut yourself up away from me—when you hide what you're thinking and feeling, when you make it seem as if you're frightened of me and

treat me as a stranger. You've never really trusted me, have you?"

He paused. The boy did not answer.

"That means you know you haven't. Why shouldn't you, Matthew? After all, when you come to think of it, it's not so very many years since I was a boy like yourself. If you'll try to remember I love you and that the likeness between us is probably much greater than you think, we ought to be friends as well as son and father. Up till now we've never really tried to know one another. What's happened this morning has shown us both that. Let's make a new start from this day and hold together as long as we live. Is that a bargain?"

Once more the boy was silent.

"You still don't trust me, Matthew?"

"What about that letter to Mary?"

"The letter? Give it to me."

Matthew handed him the crumpled envelope which he still clutched in his closed left hand. John Bradley took it and solemnly tore it to shreds. He threw the scattered fragments on to the fire, and held out his arms once more.

"Now, will you trust me, my son?"

"I'll try, Dad," the boy said sullenly.

CHAPTER TEN

(I)

It must be thirty-five years and six weeks to the day, almost, Dr. Bradley reflected, since he had thrown those fragments of paper—the last love-letter he was ever to write—into this same sitting-room grate, where now, as he noticed, the coals, though still radiating a comfortable warmth, had begun to settle.

“What would have happened,” he asked himself, for the hundredth time, “if I had posted that letter the evening before, without letting Matthew know I had written it or what it contained—if I had followed the way of my heart and married Mary Sanders? My life—all our lives—would certainly have been different. Would they, in the long run, have been any happier?”

Dr. Bradley shook his head. It was rather pathetic, he told himself, that after thirty-five years, his mind should still be so naïvely romantic as to consider a question he knew to be unanswerable, presuming one changed condition but neglecting the possible emergence of a hundred incalculable factors as little to be foreseen as those which had actually occurred: such as Mary Sanders’s precipitate marriage, within a few

months, to a paymaster-commander in the navy, stationed at Devonport, whom she met in Torquay; as the birth of her three children and the death of her husband at Jutland. Such speculations, he had told himself often, were equally vain and unprofitable. It was astonishing that a reasonable man should indulge in them. The fact that he continued to do so implied, he supposed, that his renunciation of the hope of marrying Mary had meant more to him than he realized even now.

The sacrifice had certainly been bitter enough at the time. More than once, during the days that followed his reconciliation with Matthew and the boy's departure for Brunston, he had wavered, regretting the weakness into which an access of emotional sentiment had betrayed him; he had been tempted to retract his pledge and assert his undoubted rights as an individual. Yet time and a typical irresolution, at last, had their way with him. Though he could no longer honestly regard himself in the heroic light of a martyr to duty, he could flatter himself (for what it was worth) on having made a decision that was morally unimpeachable. He had chosen, wisely or foolishly. Nothing remained for him but to make the best of his choice. It became easier to do so, he found to his satisfaction, when, a few months later, the Sanders family vacated Jubilee House and moved to Devonshire.

From this point all his interest which, hitherto, had been divided between his passion for Mary and his

duty to Matthew, became concentrated on his son. It was an interest that fortunately grew every day more absorbing. Any doubts he might ever have had as to Matthew's acceptance of their changed relationship were soon put at rest. His letters from Brunston already showed a new and enchanting frankness. The shock of that painful scene, it seemed, had had the miraculous effect of ridding the boy of the hidden desires and inhibitions which had made his masters describe him as "difficult." A new note of confidence and gaiety revealed itself in his nature. He had suddenly "found himself," as the saying goes, and had begun to enjoy the normal life of a public-school, in which his quick wits, no less than his physical aptitude, fitted him for an easy pre-eminence. The reports which came home with him at the end of the Michaelmas term confirmed the transformation. They no longer reproached him with laziness; there were no further equivocal allusions to "certain tendencies."

John felt and rejoiced in this change even more when, during the following spring, he went over to Brunston for the mid-term holiday. Though Clara had always been anxiously fluttering to and fro, he had never before found time to visit the school and appreciate the conditions under which Matthew was living. The dignity and spaciousness of the buildings delighted him. As he sat in the headmaster's pew at "chapel" on Sunday evening, he could not help wondering at the difference between his own lot—as a ragged child

in Mr. Laxton's village school-room, as the gawky handy-man in "Dr." Mortimore's limbo of books and bones—and that of his son and his son's companions, well-fed, well-clothed and well-taught, amid such gracious surroundings. It filled him with pride—and indeed with a certain amazement—to realize that it was he, the obscure Lesswardine boy, who had been able, by the work of his body and brain, to provide Matthew with these advantages. Among all these boys of the well-to-do middle-class, there were none that appeared to him brighter or healthier than his own. He felt proud of him as they walked arm-in-arm across the paved quadrangle and over the green playing-fields. For himself he had long since abandoned ambition; he had aimed, like John Hunter, at what was "practicable," and within those limits remained contented. But here, in the future of Matthew, a vista of illimitable ambitions opened before him. He began to think of the boy as an extension of himself, the proxy through whom he might achieve the heights which had daunted his own mediocre powers. The prospect of sharing and enjoying Matthew's triumphs already made life doubly worth the living, and even if he died before that proud consummation he could leave the world in the certainty that the part of himself which mattered most was persisting. This was the true immortality, he told himself: the only survival of personality in which it heartened a man to believe.

The headmaster, a youngish man named Whiteway,

with whom he talked before he returned to Sedgebury, confirmed his estimate of Matthew's newly-awakened powers.

"It may, of course, be a flash in the pan, Dr. Bradley," he told him guardedly; "but there's no denying that Matthew's developed enormously during the last two terms—in character, I mean, even more than in intelligence. It may seem a hard thing to say, and I hesitate to say it, but more often than not I've noticed that the influence of a devoted mother on an only child—and particularly on a sensitive child—is not—how shall I put it?—not entirely healthy. If Matthew goes on as he's going now, I have very bright hopes for him. It may help me a bit if you tell me what ideas you have about his future."

"I should like him to be a doctor," John said.

"That would mean his joining the 'modern' side next term. Of course, it's for you to decide; but, speaking for myself, I think that would be a pity. He has no scientific aptitude, so far as I know; and he *is* pretty good at Mathematics and languages—good enough to get an open scholarship at Oxford or Cambridge, as well as one of our closed ones, if you could only persuade him to work."

"I should like him to go to the new University of North Bromwich," John said.

"Well, of course, if he's taking up Medicine, I suppose that's all right," the headmaster said dubiously.

"You see, I was there myself: at the Medical School,

I mean, before it became a university. But it's not only a matter of sentiment. I have friends on the staff who can help him and keep an eye on him, and I could help him myself as well. He could live at home during most of his student days. Matthew and I, you know, are rather alone in the world; and to tell you the honest truth, I don't want to lose him."

"Yes, yes . . . I quite understand that. All the same, Dr. Bradley . . ." He paused. "As I said just now, an absorbing feminine influence is sometimes disastrous. I should add that an absorbing influence of any kind isn't any too good. The boy seems to have found his feet lately. Why won't you let him stand on them? If I were you I shouldn't try to make up his mind for him, and I certainly shouldn't keep him too much at home. If he discovers it isn't so easy to stand alone, he's all the better for it. And you're likely to gain more, too, in the long run, when he finds that he misses your support. Of course, there's no hurry. How old is he? Nearly sixteen? He's remarkably mature for his age. Suppose we talk the whole matter over again at the end of the term?"

These arguments were all very well in theory, John Bradley thought. In practice, once having enjoyed the possession of Matthew, he had no intention of losing sight of him. The boy's physical likeness to his own adolescent self encouraged him in the sentimental illusion he had already toyed with: the idea that, through Matthew, he had been given, as it were, a second

chance—the opportunity of achieving vicariously those higher aims which his anxiety to marry Clara and “settle down” had forced him to abandon. It was odd to think how, even after an interval of seventeen years, the stigma of Lacey’s scorn remained ineffaced and still had power to influence him. Well, here, in the shape of Matthew, was his answer to Lacey, and a complete, if somewhat tardy, justification of himself.

As the headmaster of Brunston had said, there was no immediate hurry. Another year must pass before Matthew would be old enough to begin his medical studies. In the meantime John Bradley set himself to preparing the ground. He began, for the first time since his wife’s death had made him feel the unimportance of material things, to think about money. During her lifetime, apart from occasional mild debauches of extravagance, Clara had kept a firm hand on the family finances: she had not been Jacob Medhurst’s niece for nothing. In seventeen years of steadily increasing prosperity, in which the only heavy expenses had been those connected with Matthew’s education, John had not merely freed himself from his original burden of debt, but saved money at the rate of several hundred a year. At the moment he found himself in the possession of more than three thousand pounds: a small fortune, judged by the standards of Sedgebury, where, during the boom years, many of his patients had become rich, as it were, overnight, but impressive compared with his own modest beginnings. An inborn

timidity and distrust of his own financial capacity had so far deterred him from speculation. He had been content to know that this substantial sum remained on deposit at the bank, gradually increasing, of itself, at a low rate of interest; a reserve available for his dependents in the case of his own prolonged incapacity or sudden death. Yet if Matthew were to embark with security on the ambitious career which he now envisaged—a career resembling Lacey's, which implied long periods of unremunerative research and the lean years of waiting and "keeping up appearances" which were the lot of every young consultant—he saw that an endowment larger than this would be necessary, and that, somehow or other, his slender capital must be increased by methods more rapid and adventurous than his present slow rate of saving.

He was, he admitted to himself, a child in such matters. He was still capable of feeling a thrill of embarrassed intoxication when, at the end of each quarter, the club secretaries came to the surgery and spilt out on his desk their little cascades of golden sovereigns. His personal needs were so small and his way of life so simple that never, since the first days of his uphill struggle, had he bothered his head about money. One worked day and night and gave of one's best; bills went out—Clara had seen to that—and were paid or unpaid; what remained of the proceeds, when current debts had been met, went into the bank and stayed there, and that was the

end of it. But now, he saw, it was time he began to think about money. And he did not know how to begin.

It would have been easier to set about this if the advice of his most intimate business friend, Aaron Sanders, whose judgment he trusted, had still been available. But Sanders had by now retired and was comfortably settled in his South Devon manor, where the villagers, as he naïvely boasted, already called him "squire," and John Bradley had no other friend (save the bank manager, whose imagination stopped short at two-and-a-half per cent Consols) whom he could consult.

About this time, as it happened, industry in Sedgebury had taken one of its periodical leaps forward. Over many years there had been sporadic rumours about the probable existence of deposits of coal lying untouched beyond the geological fault which broke the crown of the ridge. From time to time exploratory shafts had been sunk and abandoned; but now that the bulk of the South Staffordshire reserves—including the great "three-yard" seam which had made the Black Country possible—were becoming exhausted, new prospecting activities began and exciting discoveries were said to have been made.

John Bradley heard the reports without much enthusiasm: the possibility of workable coal being found in Sedgebury had been canvassed so often that he had ceased to believe in it. If new pits were to be

opened he would doubtless share in the town's increased prosperity, though he regretted the fact that the colliery, on whose proposed site signs of activity were already visible, would deface, with its insolent head-gear, the part of the ridge he had always regarded particularly as his own: that bluff brow from which, years ago, in a moment of rapture, he had first beheld the green lands west of Severn and the line of the Clees; his last remaining sanctuary in the forest of grimy brick that had grown up about him.

On the balance of material profit and æsthetic loss he felt rather resentful of this new spoliation, but would have paid little attention to it had it not reflected on his latest preoccupation: the question of providing funds for Matthew's career. In Sedgebury, as soon as the work was started, people with money to play with talked of little else. The syndicate behind the Sedgebury Main Colliery was a strong one, including Lord Clun, the owner of the mineral royalties and such experienced colliery-proprietors as Sir Joseph Hingston and Walter Willis of Mawne. Its managing director, a man named Furnival, was not merely an engineer of genius, but a creature of remarkable energy and enthusiasm. From the moment of his arrival in Sedgebury, Mr. Furnival's personality began to exercise such an immense, if somewhat sinister, fascination over everyone with whom he came in contact, that within a short time the local masters of industry, who prided themselves on their hard-headed-

ness, were eating out of his hand. Not unreasonably—for it soon became clear not only that Furnival knew his job, having acquired vast technical experience in the German and American coal-fields, but also that he was a man whose imagination saw things on a large scale and proposed to perform them in a grand manner which affected his cautious colleagues with a mild, but by no means unpleasant, inebriation. The enormous scope of his schemes, the ardour with which he expounded them and the amount of money he required to back them, announced the appearance in the Black Country firmament of a new star of the first magnitude and of a dazzling brilliance. The colliery was to be not merely the largest, the deepest, the most modern, the richest and the most efficient in the district, but the beginning of a new coal-field whose products would restore to the Black Country its tarnished glories, the source from whose energy a galaxy of subsidiary industries would draw life.

There was no doubt about this: there could be no doubt about anything with which Mr. Furnival was concerned. Local markets were straightway flooded with orders for all sorts of new machinery: structural steel, cable-ropes, engines, tanks, boilers, railway wagons, trolley-trucks, locomotives, electric equipment. There was hardly a trade in the district that did not benefit within a few months by this programme of lavish spending. From the tapered trellis of its head-gear to the last split pin in the axle of a trolley-

truck underground, the Sedgebury Main Colliery was to be born complete, fully-armed—like Athene out of the head of Zeus—from the brain of its sole creator, Humphrey Furnival.

John Bradley, going about his work, marked the progress of this immense parturition: the wide metalled road which, instead of the old water-worn lane, now led to his favourite viewpoint; the network of railway-sidings stretching forth to spread over the ridge from the back of the Jubilee Works; the vast loads of building materials and machinery that went rolling in front of the surgery door along Crabb's Lane. A steady current of floating labour poured into the little town from districts less fortunate, and was quickly absorbed. Many of John's patients already established in well-paid jobs forsook them for work at the colliery. A high level of wages was one of the principles on which Mr. Furnival's economic theories were based. Land values rose on the ridge. Aaron Sanders sold all his factory-sites on the south of the Jubilee Works at a fantastic figure, and received offers that would have tempted a less independent man for the works themselves.^f Soon, the great having taken their chance and got in on the ground-floor, the small investors of North Bromwich began to awaken to the fact that something quite out of the ordinary was happening at Sedgebury, and stampeded into the market like sheep into a fold. Two new issues of shares were made to accommodate them, each oversubscribed

within half an hour of the lists being opened. Long before a single ton of coal had been raised from the pit, the whole Black Country, with its tremendous resources of secret wealth, the invisible hoards acquired and put by during the wars of the nineteenth century, was "in it," up to the neck. There was hardly a small manufacturer or tradesman or publican in Sedgebury itself who had not managed to buy a small parcel of shares.

John Bradley, through sheer timidity rather than prudence, came into the Sedgebury Main market later than most of his neighbours, at a time when values, though still high, had begun to sag a little. He bought Sedgebury Mains on the best inside information—nothing less, indeed, than the advice of Furnival himself—having been called in to attend one of the great engineer's children in the brand-new manager's house which had shot up on the edge of the company's property.

It was a remarkable house, not only because of its size, which dwarfed Mr. Sanders's, but also because of the ingenuity and good taste with which Mr. Furnival himself had designed it. It was full of good pieces of furniture and modern pictures; the house of a cultured man and an artist no less than that of a man of abounding wealth. It reminded John on the surface—though with spiritual reservations—of the Lacey's equally beautiful but less flamboyant house at Alvaston. Furnival "took to" him, being glad, perhaps, to find an

intelligent listener living more or less on his doorstep. John Bradley did not exactly "take to" Furnival: the man's force and arrogance, though they fascinated him, made his company oddly disturbing. After this he was invited several times to dine with Furnival. The cooking was admirable, the wines were of a quality which he was quite unable to appreciate, but of an enlivening potency. When the meal was over and the negligible mouse-like Mrs. Furnival retired, her husband let loose a torrent of brilliant talk more richly charged with erudition and observation and wit than any John Bradley had ever listened to. In the glow of this after-dinner mood he perceived that his host, though no more likeable, was undoubtedly fashioned in an heroic mould; he was a man rather more than life-size. Though Mr. Furnival's talk wandered into regions of time and space where John could only follow it with a gasping insufficiency, passing rapidly from his recent discovery of a Roman pavement, on the track between the new pit-head and the house called Cold Harbour, to the æsthetics of the French Post-Impressionists, it invariably returned to one dominant theme: his own masterpiece in the making, the Sedgebury Main Colliery. He expounded the virtues of this creation so vividly that, by the end of the evening, John Bradley was filled with anxiety lest he had missed the best opportunity of investing in it.

"I've some savings lying idle in the bank," he explained with diffidence. "Do you think, at their

present price, the shares are worth buying? I'm asking you because I know nothing whatever about such 'things,' he added.

Mr. Furnival laughed. "No more do I, my dear doctor. Money means nothing to me. It comes and it goes. I have more than I know what to do with, but I've never scrambled for it. I'm a maker, an artist, thank God!—and not a financier. My job—and I put all my heart and imagination into it—is to turn my own dreams into actuality, to produce something that's not merely mechanically perfect, but a work of art. It just happens, because my brain isn't made that way, that I don't want to write an epic or build a cathedral or paint a great picture. But I have to satisfy my passion for plastic beauty. I love beautiful things. I can't live without them; as you can see for yourself, I have to surround myself with them. I express myself in my own way, and I give you my word that by the time I've finished with it this colliery of mine is going to be as perfect in form and as rich in significant detail as a drama by Sophocles, a Greek vase or a Beethoven symphony. It'll be lovely, because of its perfect adaptation of means to ends, of its form to its function. And nobody in the world, my dear Bradley, will ever know that except me, the man who made it, though the stupid financiers who paid for it, your Hingstons and Willises and the rest, will rub their fat hands and congratulate themselves on their shrewdness when they look at the balance-sheet—the only damned

thing they're interested in—and pick up their dividends!”

It was not easy, John thought, to extract from this torrent of boastful rhapsody the financial guidance for which he was looking. He clutched at the floating straw represented by its last word.

“So you expect to pay dividends soon?” he asked humbly. “What I’m looking for really is the chance of capital appreciation. If I thought there was any reasonable prospect of that . . .”

Mr. Furnival exploded. “Reasonable prospect of capital appreciation? God Almighty! I should just think there was. Do you know, my dear Bradley, that not one of these bloated dunderheads on my board, who call themselves business men, has the least glimmer of imagination, even now, to realize what I’ve given them? And we’ve barely begun to produce! Can’t you gather from what I’ve told you that this colliery of mine, and the other concerns that will spring up around it, will be the first of their kind—unique, because everything about them has been planned through and through by one logical brain, the only ones in the world whose economy and efficiency will never be hampered by the stupid fumbling of blunderers who have gone before them?”

John found himself caught up again in the flood of rhetoric, submerged in a welter of detail which convinced him of nothing except the indisputable fact that Furnival must be right. When he left the house in the

small hours he was already converted. Next morning he drew from the bank every penny he possessed and bought Sedgbury Main Ordinaries. He felt himself fortunate to have secured them at a premium of forty per cent.

(II)

As the school holidays approached, he awaited Matthew's return from Brunston with a lover's trepidations. The headmaster had sounded the boy on the subject of his taking up Medicine as a career, but reported that Matthew had failed to show any pronounced inclination in this, or indeed, in any other direction. That was all to the good, John felt. In that case it would be easier to influence the boy's undetermined mind. The task, at the outset, appeared to be even simpler than he had imagined.

The old antagonism had vanished; the intimacies of that mid-term visit to Brunston had removed the last shreds of instinctive suspicion from Matthew's mind. Since Mary Sanders had gone, and the Martyn girls were too deeply engrossed in a number of new and more serious love affairs to spare much time on a boy of sixteen, he was only too glad to fall back on his father's society, apart from which he would have been bored and at a loose end.

John Bradley rejoiced in the opportunity of distracting and amusing him. The boy's presence lightened his.

loneliness and gave life a new zest. He found acute pleasure as well as pride in exploring Matthew's mind—a mind lit by unexpected gleams and swift intuitions; a mind that was not merely brighter but more mature than his own had been at a corresponding age. It was also, he discovered, more ruthless; and this quality, though it shocked him at first, appeared to him, on reflection, no disadvantage. The world through which he had stumbled and groped in his youth had been softer and kindlier, less fiercely competitive than that which his son would be called upon to face: it was just as well that nature should have armed him against it.

In the meantime, with conscious guile, he did his best to make his own middle-aged company attractive to Matthew by inveigling him into sharing that part of his professional activities which seemed most likely to attract and amuse him. He did this cautiously, feeling his way, in the hope that familiarity with the atmosphere of general practice, unconsciously absorbed, as it were, along with the smells of surgery and dispensary, might incline Matthew's mind to accept as a matter of course and without too obvious persuasion the calling which he was so anxious that he should adopt. He took the boy out on his rounds with him, and talked in an untechnical way of the cases they visited. When they came home, he set him to rolling pills and making up bottles of medicine. He taught him to bandage limbs, apply splints and put on dress-

ings. When a fracture came in to the surgery he made him help with the setting and dragged out the bones of Captain Kidd from their box in the attic to demonstrate the mechanics of the process. Remembering "Dr." Mortimore, he remarked that the boy had good "hands"—more like Clara's, indeed, than his own—a musician's rather than a surgeon's—yet deft and supple.

He taught Matthew to use a microscope too. Together they examined crystals and insects' legs and drops of pond-water under the quarter-inch lens. They generated hydrogen from acid and iron filings and detonated the explosive mixture of the gas with oxygen to form water. It was all a game, of course, and yet—for Matthew no less than for his father—an entrancing game; for the young brain, once interested, was greedy for information, and John's function as an encyclopædia of mysterious knowledge invested him with more credit than he had usually enjoyed in Matthew's eyes. If he was flattered by this new respect, he felt, even more deeply, touched by signs of an increasing affection. Though he was far too shy by nature to ask for it, what he needed most from his son was not veneration or even companionship, but love; and during these holidays their relation certainly became warmer and more human than ever before.

Since the departure of Mary, whose sympathy had encouraged it, Matthew's passion for music had waned: he no longer took refuge from the awkwardness of his

father's company within the mystery of unintelligible sound. The piano was silent at night. So long as John answered his eager questions he was content to do nothing but listen. For long hours they sat talking quietly in the gas-lit sitting-room while John spoke of his own student-days in North Bromwich, recalling (and almost recapturing) the youthful enthusiasms he had once shared with Martin Lacey. When he spoke of those unforgettable hours which had meant so much to him, John Bradley seemed to be living them over again—or, at least, preparing the way for a renewal of them. He told Matthew how hotly Lacey and he had been involved in the Listerian controversy—a controversy no longer, seeing that since those days, in less than twenty short years, Lister's battle had been won and his combative claims become surgical commonplace. He described the Laceys' house in Alvaston: its books, its pictures, its general air of an intellectual aristocracy, enhanced by the names of the great Victorians who had breathed it. He spoke of the lamp-lit orangery in the Laceys' garden, where Martin and he had "read" and talked together far into the pale summer night, deciding, with the self-confidence and arrogance of youth, what the future held for each of them. If, in all these rich memories, Lacey appeared as a hero, John painted him so deliberately, holding up this paragon's career, the fulfilment of his own relinquished ambitions, as the example and inspiration he hoped his son might follow.

"Why haven't you ever told me about him before?" Matthew asked.

"I'm afraid we've rather lost touch. You see our ways diverged for a number of reasons. Lacey always carried more guns than me: I soon came to see that I couldn't keep up with him. Besides which, by the time I was qualified, I had fallen in love with your mother and we wanted to marry."

"But why should your marrying mother have stopped you doing the same as Mr. Lacey?"

"Because I hadn't money enough to do both. It was a good thing for me I chose as I did. Otherwise, I should never have had you, Matthew."

"Were you so hard up as all that, Dad?"

"I should just think I was!"

John Bradley laughed. Until he heard that innocent question it had not occurred to him that Matthew, in all probability, knew nothing whatever about his origins and his early struggles. It was odd, he reflected, yet characteristic of her, that Clara should never have told him. If, as it seemed, she hadn't, the sooner Matthew knew all about them the better.

He began to describe his ragged childhood in Lesswardine: the mean cottage down by the river; his father's death and his mother's re-marriage; the fantastic interlude of his apprenticeship to "Dr." Mortimore; the old man's end, and the unexpected legacy that had set him on his feet. As he spoke, he watched

Matthew's face, alternately thrilled by the romantic history and incredulous, shocked, bewildered.

"So you see," he said at last, "it was a pretty hard fight. I don't think, when all's said and done, I came out so badly. You'll have more advantages to start with, thank heaven, than I ever had. You're beginning where I left off, you know. Why, what's the matter?"

Matthew shook his head. "I . . . I can't quite take it in, Dad. You see . . . well, I'd always thought you were born a gentleman. It sounds horrid, but you know what I mean."

John Bradley laughed out loud. "A gentleman? My dear child, that's a dangerous word. Nobody's born a gentleman, Matthew; but anybody can become one. Don't look so distressed! Am I any different now from what I was half an hour ago?"

"Of course you aren't. It isn't that in the least, Dad. Only . . . When you've been thinking all the time you were one sort of person and find out you're another . . . I'd always thought we were distant cousins of Lord Clun's. I told the Martyns we were. I can see now why mother was always so awfully mysterious about things of that kind."

And so could John Bradley. Poor Clara . . . He could imagine for himself how indignant she would have been if she had heard him making these highly-discreditable revelations. No doubt her concealment from Matthew of his humble origins, her suggestion,

so slenderly grounded, of his problematical kinship with the Powyses, had been deliberate. He did not blame her for it: the attitude of mind had been as natural to her as the shape of her body, the colour of her eyes and her hair—of a piece with the pitiful little conventions to which she had clung; her anxiety always to do the proper thing and only to know the right people; her hankering after a hyphenated name for herself and a Doctor's degree for him. He thought of her pitifully, because such things, ridiculous and despicable as they were, had, none the less, been part of her, and because he had loved her.

"You still look shocked, Matthew," he said.

"Well, it's a bit of a knock-out, you know, Dad. There's nothing to be ashamed of, not really, is there? All the same, I'm jolly glad none of the fellows at Brunston know."

"It might be a good thing for you, if they did."

"Does the 'head' know about it?"

"I don't suppose so—unless your mother told him."

"I bet mother didn't do *that*," Matthew said decidedly.

Indeed, after a while, John found with some amusement, he became so far reconciled as to clamour for more details in what, after all, was rather an exciting story. John told him about the pony drive at Nant Goidel; of the great trout that rose from deep pools in the Teme when the may-fly was up; of the birds that haunted the stream—standing herons and running

sandpipers and kingfishers; of the macabre mysteries of "Dr." Mortimore's dusty golgotha—including Miss Kilmansegg.

"Was the house really as dirty as that, Dad?" Matthew asked.

"Well, I suppose it was pretty dirty; but I've seen many worse since I started doctoring."

"I should love to go to Lesswardine some day and see it."

"Perhaps some day we will."

And all the time, as they talked of these and other indifferent things, John Bradley was busy implanting suggestions that might induce the boy to take, of his own free will, the course he wished him to follow. If he were to enter the Medical School at the earliest suitable age, in eighteen months' time, it would be necessary for him to drop classics and go over to the Modern Side at the beginning of the next term. A week before he was due to return to school, John suggested the change. He saw Matthew's face fall.

"We always rather look down on the Moderns at Brunston," he said.

"If you're going to take up Medicine it's the best thing to do."

"Mother always said I should go to Oxford or Cambridge. Couldn't I study Medicine there?"

"You could, of course. But that usually means taking an Arts degree first, and that swallows up two years. I'm not sure I can afford it, Matthew."

"I could get a classical scholarship, I'm sure, if I worked."

"I don't think they like men who've won classical scholarships taking up Medicine. You do want to be a doctor, don't you?"

"I suppose I might just as well be a doctor as anything else."

"Don't you feel more strongly than that, Matthew? I thought you did."

"I don't want to go to North Bromwich. It sounds horribly second-rate."

"I'm afraid we shall have to cut our coat according to our cloth. It's a first-rate Medical School. After all, I was there myself, and so was your mother's uncle, Jacob Medhurst. There's another advantage. I know all the professors. Many of them were my own contemporaries: Martin Lacey, for instance."

"Yes, I should like to know him."

"I could help you myself, as well. And, best of all from my point of view, it would mean that we needn't be separated. You could live here at Sedgebury and go in by train every day. I don't want to lose you again . . . so soon after I've found you, Matthew."

"Well . . . If you can't afford anything else, I suppose it will have to be that, Dad."

"You don't really want to live here with me?"

"Of course I do, Dad."

He spoke with a smile; but the smile was reluctant. John saw that his eyes were cold.

"I don't want to force you to take up this work against your will, Matthew."

"Well, I've got to earn my living somehow, haven't I?"

It was not an encouraging end to the discussion. This lukewarm acquiescence showed that he had failed in his cunning attempts to awaken in Matthew an enthusiasm comparable with his own; that even if he had been mildly amused by playing at being a doctor, the boy had no positive vocation. John comforted himself with the reflection that he was still young, that it was too much to expect that a child still too deeply bruised, in spite of appearances, by the loss of his mother should feel strongly about anything else. Another year or so, he assured himself, would make all the difference; it would be better in the meantime to let the matter take its own course. The seed had been planted. The rest lay beyond his control.

In the following autumn Matthew passed the London Matriculation. His performance was by no means brilliant, and his low place in the list weakened his chance of being elected to one of the Brunston leaving scholarships. The headmaster was brutally candid. The boy's brains were all right—so good, indeed, that, if only he had chosen to use them, he could easily have taken honours.

"But the truth of the matter is," he confided to John, "that he's a lazy young dog. He knows perfectly well that he can scrape through anything and save his bacon

without doing a stroke of work. He appears to have no ambition; and if you tackle him about it, as I've done once or twice, he turns sullen. The same sort of things shows itself in other things as well as in his work. If he chose to take himself seriously I should have made him a prefect. But he won't, and he doesn't like discipline. He knows he can get all the admiration he wants without any exertion from boys who are less intelligent, and the consequence is that he's surrounded himself with a group of admirers and friends who are obviously his inferiors: some of the least admirable in the school. I'm actually rather concerned about this. A public school's an odd place. Fashions of thinking—of attitude—run through it like an epidemic of measles. A clever boy like your son can exert an enormous influence for good or evil; and I'm sorry to say Matthew's influence isn't a good one."

"There's no vice in him?"

"No . . . I shouldn't like to say that. All the same . . ."

"You think he's not good for Brunston. Is the school good for *him*?"

"Yes, that's rather the point. You see, he's not made to pattern. If he found himself in surroundings less cut and dried than those on which we think it's our job to insist, among young men older than himself and better equipped, it might be a good thing for him."

"Well, he's passed his matric. Is there any reason

now why he shouldn't go to North Bromwich University right away?"

"From my point of view, none at all. I can't be quite so sure about his. I've an idea, in the back of my mind, that part of his present awkwardness—let's call it that—may be due to an unconscious sense of frustration, of inferiority. That's what makes him so anxious to be popular, even when popularity's cheap. I gather, from what he's told me, that he had set his heart on going to Oxford or Cambridge—his mother had encouraged him in that—and that he feels North Bromwich a bit of a social come-down. Boys are awful snobs, you know, doctor. So are most of us, I suppose, if it comes to that."

"I can't possibly afford to send him to Oxford or Cambridge."

"So you told me before. Well, then; let him go to North Bromwich. It may help him to find his place and be the making of him."

"You sound as if you'd be rather relieved if I took him away."

"No, no: you mustn't think that. I'm sure there's no harm in him. But he's difficult . . . difficult."

"I think I shall be able to put that right," John Bradley said confidently. "After all, it's only just lately, since his mother's death, that Matthew and I have begun to know one another. He's like me in some ways and like his mother in others, and I understand both. I'll stop at North Bromwich on the way back

and put his name down for entrance in the autumn session."

(III)

It had been a proud day—perhaps, Dr. Bradley reflected, one of the proudest in his life—when, in the following September, he took Matthew into North Bromwich to interview the Dean of the Faculty. With the college's rise to the status of a university it had not greatly enhanced its dignity. The Dean's Office, indeed, was now situated at the back of a more modern building which had once been Astill's College; but it was very much at the back of it, approached from a street lined with grimy warehouses by an entrance which a family solicitor would have disdained as likely to make any new client doubt his firm's respectability: a doorway which people appeared to slink through rather than enter.

Yet, when once this mean adit was penetrated, the smell of the interior was curiously the same—almost as if the atmosphere of the old Prince's had been bodily transported to the school's new quarters along with its furniture, its staff and its archives. The porter who had glared at John and bidden him enter nearly a quarter of a century before still stood on guard and professed, not entirely convincingly, to recognize him. The same sort of congregation of students stood

waiting confidently or nervously for their interviews. The "year" nineteen hundred and five differed very little in their numbers or in their quality, John thought, from the "year" eighteen hundred and eighty-two—apart from the noticeable fact that the men composing it appeared to be younger—they were mere boys, and surely his own contemporaries had been whiskered or bearded men? Nor did anyone in that shy company, he assured himself, look so distinguished as Martin Lacey had looked or so rustic as himself. This tame uniformity was a sign of the times. During the last twenty-two years the mechanical age had flattened humanity out like a rolling-mill. In dress, in demeanour, even in looks, these young men seemed cut to a pattern. The phrase was familiar: it was the one the headmaster of Brunston had used a few months ago. Matthew, he had said, wasn't cut to a pattern. Was that a matter for congratulation or a reason for anxiety? John Bradley could not say.

Yes, the smell of the place was the same: he perceived it even more clearly when, the formalities of registration completed, they tramped down the echoing corridors paved with concrete and mounted the staircase to the dissecting-room, from whose doors the old charnel-house odour issued to greet them. Here, at least, it seemed as if nothing had altered: the same desiccated changelings reclined on the zinc-topped tables; the same groups of students in shirt-sleeves pored over their "parts" like vultures clustered round

fragments of carrion. The small grizzled man who ~~came~~ limping towards them and scrutinized them suspiciously was surely John's old friend Diggle, the anatomy porter, grown rather more bald and sere and shrivelled, a few degrees nearer the state of the subjects he handled, but otherwise the same. When he saw John and Matthew approach, his merry blue eyes, in their thickets of grey brows and whiskers, lit up with a kindly twinkle of recognition.

"Well, I'm jiggered," he said, "if it isn't Mr. Bradley." He wiped his noisome palms on a greasy apron and held out his hand. John shook it heartily, though Matthew shrank from its touch.

"It was clever of you to recognize me, Diggle," he said.

Diggle cocked his head cunningly and laughed. "That's one of my tricks, sir. I never forget a face, dead or living, that's passed, as you might say, through my 'ands. I can't put a name to the year you come here, sir—that's too much to ask—but I mind quite well you went shares in your very first 'part' with Mr. Lacey. Twenty years ago, it must be; but I reckon I should have known you anywhere. Yo've not changed that much, Mr. Bradley."

"I've changed a lot more than you have."

"Well, well . . . I can't complain. I've not got the sprile that I had, you know, but taking it all round, it's an 'ealthy calling, there's no denying. What with breathing the air and 'andling my subjects, my body's

that pickled and preserved, as you might say, that if I 'appened to take a nap on one of the tables, I reckon I should find myself being dissected before I woke up."

"I've brought you my son," John said. "Will you look after him, Diggle?"

"I've no need to be told who he is, sir. The young gentleman's the very spit of you. I'll look after him all right, never fear. As a matter of fact he's in luck, Mr. Bradley. I've a beautiful female—Number Thirteen—a'coming upstairs to-morrow: one of the loveliest subjects that's come my way for years: a regular treat for sore eyes, as the saying is. So I'll put his name down for a part at once." He turned to Matthew. "What d'you fancy, sir: upper or lower? I can give you first choice, for old times's sake, as they say."

Matthew looked at his father inquiringly. John noticed, for the first time, that his face had gone deathly pale. It was drawn and strained; his lips drooped at the corners; he gulped, as though he were fighting a qualm of nausea.

"All right, Matthew?" he asked.

"I've got one of my 'heads' coming on, Dad. It's close in here, isn't it? If you don't mind, I think I'd better get back to the station and catch the first train home."

"Have you got your ticket?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think I have. Good-bye, Dad."

He made a precipitate bolt for the door and was gone.

Diggle shook his bald head with its grizzled fringe: "It's funny, like, the different ways it takes different gentlemen. Some stomachs is born to turn and some isn't: that's how it is. But, weak or strong, it don't take them long to get over it. It's a matter of habit, as you might say; and I reckon as how, if so be I was forced to give up my job and had to eat all my meals at home, it 'ld put me right off my food—so there you are! Well, I'll put your young gentleman down for that part, and I give you my word he'll have nothing to grumble at. A beautiful subject. Come here from the city mortuary, she did. Case of suicide. Gas-poisoning or summat. I suppose you don't often see Mr. Lacey nowadays?"

"I shall be seeing him in half an hour's time."

"Think of that now! My word, he hasn't half got on in the world, Mr. Bradley! Professor of Surgery and all! Well, we can't all come out on the top, and that's the truth; but I reckon I'm not a bad hand at spotting a winner, and I spotted him from the moment I first set eyes on him. Getting on pretty fair yourself, sir, I hope!"

"I've nothing to complain of."

Diggle shook his head: "Complaining's no good, Mr. Bradley. That's the one thing I've learnt from my job. Complaining or not complaining, we all come to the same, and whether we come to it by way of a

gas-oven and a coroner's inquest, finishing up in my vats downstairs, like Number Thirteen, or drawn on a blooming gun-carriage to Westminster Abbey, it'll be all one to us, you make no mistake. Keep your end up as long as your strength lasts and make the best of it, that's my motto, sir. I'll keep an eye on the young gentleman—never you fear!"

John Bradley made his way across town to the Prince's Hospital. Though the Boer War had made North Bromwich more bloated with riches than ever, the face of that central area had not changed; he saw the same dirty streets, the same stifled congeries of back-to-backs, the same solemn lines of soot-bleared factory-windows, through which he had tramped twenty years ago, when he "did" his midwifery cases. The quarter was ugly and even degraded; and yet, as he recognized the names of the streets and the numbers of the courts he had penetrated on that unsavoury business, he felt oddly happy to be among them once more: though the patients he had attended, for all he knew, might be dead or live there no longer, there was something comforting in the unchanging persistence of this familiar squalor; he welcomed it not for itself, but simply because it had been the background of his youth, and smiled to find that (unlike himself) it looked "not a day older."

The hospital, too, seemed materially unchanged, though a new porter, who did not know him, challenged his entrance and the board which informed

one which of the honorary physicians and surgeons was in or out of the building showed a number of unfamiliar names. He was on the point of inquiring where he would be likely to find Mr. Lacey, when he found himself confronted by a heavily-built young man in a long white overall, whose plain but good-natured face he seemed vaguely to remember.

"Hullo, doctor," the young man said with a smile. "What are you doing here? Can I help you in any way?"

John recognized him as the elder of the two Dakers brothers, whom, a few years before, he had casually met at the Martyns' at Silver Street.

"Yes, indeed, you can help me," he said. "I want to find Lacey."

"That's easy. He's operating. You'll catch him in Number Two Theatre."

"Number Two? In my day there was only one."

"Number Two's the one you'll remember. Can you find your way there?"

"I should just think I could. I dressed for old Cartwright."

Jonathan Dakers looked puzzled. "Cartwright? Yes, I think I've heard of him. But that must have been donkey's years ago."

"Almost before you were born."

Dakers laughed. "Quite sure you can get there? I'll take you along if you like."

John refused his escort and thanked him. How

familiar, yet unfamiliar, the long corridors seemed! He passed Cartwright's surgical ward. It did not smell of carbolic, nor yet, on the air, was there the faintest whiff of the "good old surgical stink." He met several nurses who looked at him curiously and lowered their eyes. They were different, he thought, from the homely old bodies he used to know: younger, prettier, smarter. One would have guessed, at a glance, they were "ladies." The whole atmosphere of the place, though the building was the same as when he remembered it, appeared to have undergone a similar transformation: it was sweeter, airier, even (it seemed to him) lighter.

He came to the door of the theatre and opened it cautiously. The end of the room where, in his days, the surgeons had hung their operating-coats had been walled off from the rest, and was devoted now to the administering of anæsthetics and smelt of ether. The rough boarded floor, uncarpeted once save by a strip of ragged linoleum in front of the fireplace, was covered now with an unbroken surface of rubber composition. The walls and ceiling were faced with white washable paint. A window of frosted glass, let into the side of the room where the fire-breast had stood, admitted a mild but searching light, which illuminated the whole space so thoroughly that not the least speck of dust could have remained unperceived in it.

John Bradley, awed by this almost intimidating

cleanliness, moved across it on tiptoe and opened the door of the theatre.

The sight of that glistening shrine of sterility, with its shining encaustic walls, its electric sterilizers and drums of dressings, its tables of white enamel, its shadowless lights illuminating the white-masked, white-shrouded figures of the nurses, the surgeon, his assistants and the attentive students, took his breath with surprise. As he stood there, the operator, unrecognizable in his mask and the hood which covered his hair, looked up sharply and waved him back. A dozen other shocked eyes regarded him, while a woman, the theatre-sister no doubt, came hurriedly towards him.

"You can't come in here without an overall," she whispered. "Mr. Lacey is operating."

She shut the door in his face. The glittering vision vanished. John Bradley resigned himself to waiting. There was no chair on which he could sit down. The outer room might have been planned, he thought, in its emptiness, to deprive the eyes and the mind of any interest. He waited, humiliated and isolated, as it were, in a sterile vacuum, until the inner door opened silently and the table on which the patient lay passed out on noiseless wheels. Even then he dared not enter that white arcanum. Other figures, divested of their masks and white overalls came out and walked past him. One and all, it seemed to him, regarded him with contempt or abhorrence as an impious intruder who had committed an unforgivable crime.

At last Lacey emerged. At first sight John hardly knew him, his face was so drawn and thin, of such a waxen pallor, so tense and preoccupied. When he saw John, the sombre face lit up with the quick, delightful smile which he knew and loved so well.

"So *you* were the criminal!" he cried. "A ghost, my dear John, a survival from the bad old days of good old Cartwright! How do you like our new theatre?"

"You gave me no chance of liking it."

Lacey laughed. "Well, times are changed. We live in an atmosphere of devastating asepsis. We shall soon be operating in sterile diving-suits. I'm not sure, between you and me, we don't overdo it a little, when I think of old Simpson-Lyle, and the results he obtained with nothing but the devil's own luck and soap-and-water. But then, in these days, I'm becoming almost more of a teacher than a surgeon. One teaches by over-statement. A counsel of perfection. It's my job to din the idea of asepsis into my students' ears till, allowing for the conditions of general practice and human frailty, they acquire the habit of being reasonably clean. Come along; let's walk in the courtyard and get some fresh air."

They walked to and fro on the broad asphalt path between the great blocks of new wards.

"What were you doing this morning?" John Bradley asked.

"Excising a Gasserian Ganglion for intractable

facial neuralgia. It's a pretty job. I wish you had seen it, John. You know—" and once more the old radiant enthusiasm came into his voice, the old lambent light into his eyes—"that's a matter we haven't really tackled yet: the Surgery of the Brain. We're scared of the Brain—just as when you and I were students we were still scared of the abdomen. And that's why, as yet, we know practically nothing about it; we're really not much ahead of the stone-age man who had the courage to trephine a skull cracked by a slingstone with a chipped flint. Do you remember how those old physicians of ours used to sniff at surgery as if it were a craft that had been completely explored and was incapable of expansion? Things have happened since then: nerve-grafting, short-circuiting. The Surgery of the Lungs and the Heart, which, in our time, nobody dared touch. Brain-surgery comes next on the list. You wait and see!" He laughed; then his face grew grave again. "But what are you doing here?"

"I came to see you."

"No more trouble, I hope? The last time we met was a sad one."

"My boy's just entered the School. We've been interviewing the Dean. I meant to bring him along with me, but he went home with an attack of migraine."

"Poor chap! That's another thing the physicians ought to get on to. Still, it's good to see you, old fellow. A boy of yours beginning Medicine already!"

That makes us look old, John. I suppose we are growing old. Time passes so quickly."

"I want you to keep an eye on him, Martin."

"Of course I'll keep an eye on him, with the greatest of pleasure. You're a lucky man, John. I envy you having a son."

"You've only yourself to thank for that. You're a wealthy man. Why didn't you ever marry?"

"Ah well . . . In the beginning, of course, I was far too busy. I wanted to work to a plan, and I couldn't afford diversions. And now . . . well, now it's too late."

"You're only the same age as myself, my dear fellow. We're both of us in the early forties. How can you say it's too late?"

"Since then I've become a casualty."

John looked at him sharply. Lacey's lips were smiling; but the smile was slightly tremulous.

"A wounded man, John," he said. He pointed to his right index finger. "Do you see this scar? I don't suppose you can. It's almost invisible: I'm the only person who's conscious of it. Well, that was once a hard chancre. The pallid spirochaete."

"Good God, Martin! My poor old fellow!"

Lacey shook his head and smiled. "Don't look so distressed, John. A surgeon's always in the front line, you know, and it's no use squealing if you have the bad luck to be hit. It's just the fortune of war. I might have been blown to bits by a virulent dose of strepto-

cocci. Instead of which, I get this—which is slower and much more unpleasant. The word Syphilis has an ugly sound because of its associations. If lay people would use it more frequently and talk out loud about it, just as they talk about tubercle or smallpox—or German measles, for that matter—instead of always whispering it, it wouldn't sound nearly so dreadful. It's far more common than you think—among surgeons, I mean. There must be hundreds of medical men at this moment in the same box as myself. You look at an ordinary sore throat, and the patient chokes and spits in your eye; if you're a dentist you examine an ulcerated gum or an abscess at the root of a tooth, and you just happen to have a bit of torn skin on your finger—as I did, worse luck. The thing may be even so small that, at the time, you don't realize what it is. I knew what mine was from the first."

"And you treated it early?"

"Of course I treated it. I've every reason to believe that I'm cured. But I'm taking no risks, John; and certainly I shall never marry."

"Supposing you were mistaken?"

"No, I wasn't mistaken. Some day we may discover a blood-test that will put things like that beyond doubt. I was over in Germany last autumn. There's a fellow called Wasserman actually working on it, and he's confident something may come of it. And there's another man, Ehrlich, a chemist, who's busy with the idea of producing some substance—a non-poisonous

organic compound of arsenic or antimony probably—that can be injected into the blood-stream and kill these damned organisms without killing the patient as well. That's a marvellous idea—and, like all the great ideas, simple: to do, in the lymph and blood and tissues of the living body, what Lister did on the surface. But he's not got there yet—my friend Ehrlich, I mean. The substances he's produced so far are much too toxic—though there's one arsenical salt called Atoxyl which the Germans have used in East Africa to kill the trypanosome of Sleeping Sickness in that way. Life is cheap in East Africa, and the disease is fatal in any case. Unfortunately Atoxyl blinds as often as it cures. And I'd rather be dead than blind, John."

"You're in touch with this fellow Ehrlich?"

"Of course. It's a race with Time. All our job is a race with Time, John: Medicine trying to keep pace with disease, and always blundering along a length or two behind. But the race isn't hopeless. Our pace is always quickening. Only think of the ground we've gained during the last twenty years. There's a chance that if Ehrlich and Wasserman or one of the hundreds of others engaged in research hurry up. . . . My dear fellow, let's talk no more about it. I've told you all this because you're my oldest medical friend." His tone changed of a sudden; he spoke briskly: "I'll look after that boy of yours when he comes my way. If he's like you, it'll be amusing. D'you remember the Orangery at our old house—how we used to talk there

and how young and earnest we were? That's a long time ago, John. But we're still alive—thank God!—we're still alive. And life's a grand thing in spite of the scurvy tricks that are played on us. Good-bye, old man . . .” He held out his hand—the hand with the invisible scar—and John Bradley gripped it firmly. “I wish I had time to take you round my wards—I'm rather proud of them. We heal everything by first intention nowadays: no more ‘laudable pus’!—but I'm due to do an appendix at Stourton in half an hour's time. Good-bye again—and good luck to you.”

He moved off, with his old swinging gait, a slender, urgent figure. In the distance he turned and smiled and waved his hand. As John reached the porter's lodge, he caught one brief glimpse of Lacey again: the fine face no longer transfigured and illumined with kindness, but pale, tense, agonized, in the relaxation of utter weariness. He leant back in the high tonneau of an enormous Daimler. The porter saluted him as the car started and swept him away; but Lacey did not see the salute, his eyes were closed. John Bradley watched the big Daimler disappearing. He heard the porter mumbling, as though to himself: “What's wrong with Mr. Lacey is that he works too 'ard: never gives 'imself any rest night or day, from what I can see, and that's asking for trouble. One of these days 'e'll crack up of a sudden, and nobody to blame but 'imself.”

John Bradley walked back to the station in a

saddened mood. He had heard, in his time, a good deal of scornful talk on the lips of laymen (and those of his colleagues, too) about specialists and consultants: an unscrupulous race of charlatans, established in the fashionable medical quarter, who battered, so it was said, on the credulity of the unfortunate folk who fell into their clutches and extracted blackmail from their victims by threats of pain or of death; men who performed unnecessary operations and palmed off expensive courses of treatment which they knew would be useless on poor people who could not afford them; men callous and predatory, exploiters of human fear.

No doubt, in the world of Medicine as in other worlds, such men existed; but in the North Bromwich which he had known for nearly a quarter of a century he could not think of more than one—and that one an honest, misguided crank rather than a cynical charlatan. The usual type of consultant, physician or surgeon, was nearer to that of Lacey: a man impelled by genuine devotion to science (or by the excusable desire to make the best use of exceptional talents: what did it matter?) to perfect his art through long years of unpaid practice among "hospital" patients. Compared with the lot of these men, it seemed to him, the life of a general practitioner, such as himself, was not merely unadventurous but relatively secure. From the moment he qualified and bought his practice, the general practitioner could count on a steady income, large or small—while the prospective consultant was fitting himself for his future

by a series of resident hospital appointments which earned little more than his "keep," and periods of research, at home and abroad, during which he must feed for himself without earning a penny. And after this long probation—at a time when the general practitioner had found his feet and established himself—the consultant, unknown and still unpaid, must strive, against fierce competition, for the privilege of serving on the honorary staff of a hospital. He might give such devoted service for years before he was paid a fee: it was not until the students whom he had taught went out into the world and, perhaps, remembered him kindly, that he could hope for a private patient; and the patients his students sent him, in all probability, would be lower middle-class folk who shrank from the promiscuity of a hospital ward yet could barely afford to pay the cost of entering a nursing-home, let alone the fees of a surgeon, so that, more often than not, he would end by offering his services for nothing.

And when, at the last, a middle-aged man, he became a "full" surgeon or physician on his hospital's honorary staff with wards of his own, a consultant of repute, he would find himself bound by the same conditions. Year in and year out, with a growing responsibility, and no less drudgery, he must toil in those wards and teach and operate. It was a matter of honour with most consultants that hospital work should come before private practice; and, even in private practice,

the sliding scale which decreed that no patient should be asked to pay more than he could afford reduced the average fee to a moderate figure. How many of the great surgeons of his own student days, John Bradley asked himself, had lived long enough or earned enough money to enjoy the fruits of their labours in a tranquil retirement? Cartwright, Borden, Simpson-Lyle . . . Not one of these three had reached man's allotted span; not one had died wealthy; all three had died in harness; three strong men worn out, before their time, by sheer physical strain and unceasing anxiety.

He thought of another man he had known: the first radiologist at the North Bromwich Infirmary, who, handling X-rays before their malignant properties came to be realized, had lost first a hand and then a forearm and now the whole arm to the shoulder, yet still, armless and doomed, carried on with his deadly work. He thought of the pioneers of the new pathology—men still in the prime of life who, to prove the virtues of the vaccines they had made or the drugs their chemical collaborators had invented, had inoculated themselves in cold blood with the organisms of loathsome or mortal ailments. Yet these were not all. How many anonymous martyrs, engaged to-day in labours less spectacular, might not be, for all he knew, like Martin Lacey, already the victims of their profession's hazards—front-line casualties (as Lacey himself had put it) in the warfare against death and

disease? In that perilous calling where a tiny prick in the finger might spell immediate catastrophe or, as in Lacey's case, the indefinite, more terrible menace of general degeneration, paralysis, or even insanity, these devoted men went on with their work day by day, with no time to think of the morrow. In this reverent mood it seemed to him that his own life, in its humdrum security, was on a lower, a less heroic plane than theirs. By their standards it was a failure; yet each man, he told himself, must live according to his powers. As the slow train, jolting and rumbling, carried him back to Mawne Road on the way to Sedgebury, he was thinking less of his own humble present than of Matthew's future. He thought of it fondly, with tender hope and compassion. After all, that was the only thing now that mattered much to him.

(IV)

The only thing—and yet it sufficed to fill his mind with an all-absorbing interest. It became the fixed point to which all his thoughts were related, round which all his activities revolved. Not even Clara herself, whom he had reproached for her infatuation, had been more single-minded in her solicitude for Matthew than John Bradley was now. The household routine, established for twenty years, was revolutionized to suit Matthew's comfort and convenience. Much to

Emma's annoyance, the train by which Matthew travelled daily to North Bromwich left Mawne Road at ten minutes past eight, so she must now—at her time of life!—get up an hour earlier and have breakfast on the table by seven o'clock sharp. Since Matthew had time for no more than a hurried snack in the middle of the day she must prepare what she called a "late dinner" for eight o'clock, when John's "surgery" was over, and start washing-up at nine—the hour at which, previously, she had gone to bed. If the house which, during "the master's" time and Dr. Harbord's before him, she had managed to run like a piece of clock-work was to be turned topsy-turvy in this way, she would have to get in another "girl" to help her. She wasn't one to complain, she said, but she reckoned her time was no longer her own.

Nor was John's his, for that matter. Ever since he had been in Sedgebury, he had jealously guarded the hours between supper and bedtime as the crown of the long day's work, a period of respite and relaxation in which he could take his ease. Now all this was altered. As soon as the dinner-table was cleared he must pull his sleepy wits together and help Matthew with his work. He did not grudge this attention. The exercise of going to school again was good for him, in a way, he told himself, if only because it showed him how rusty his mind had grown and how many things it had forgotten. It proved also, to his delight, how much quicker and brighter Matthew's brain was than

his own, and he felt how fortunate this was in view of the enormous widening of the curriculum, even in its first year, since his student-days. If he had had to learn then all that Matthew was supposed to know now, he doubted if he would ever have passed his First Examination!

It delighted him, too, to find that Matthew was much more enthusiastic about his work than he had ever hoped he would be. He was enjoying himself in North Bromwich. It wasn't such a bad place after all. The other fellows, of course, were an extremely mixed lot—not more than a quarter of them were public-school men and one or two were quite impossible—but the select few with whom he associated (and who shared his contempt for the others' vulgarity) were a cheery crowd. They kept themselves more or less to themselves and went their own way. They were not, he confessed, very brilliant: most of the "year's" intelligence seemed, regrettably, to be concentrated among the less presentable. There was only one thing that troubled him and made life rather difficult: all these new friends of his, the only "possible" people, lived in Alvaston or the fashionable southern suburbs; their parents were comfortably-off and gave their sons substantial allowances; they had money to spare for trifles that weren't really important but made a chap feel rather small and "out of it" if he couldn't take his share and "pay his whack"; they were allowed to run up bills with their fathers' tailors—with the result

that, although they were far too well-mannered to comment on his shabbiness, he knew quite well that they couldn't help noticing that he looked like a tramp.

"You see, Dad," he said rather wistfully, "I've only had one new suit since the time I left Brunston. I press the trousers under the mattress every night, but they look just as baggy next morning. They're too short, you see; and my boots are such beastly, heavy things, all buckled up at the toes. All the other fellows wear glacé kid shoes and put trees in them. And I think, as I *was* at Brunston, I really ought to wear an Old Brunstonian tie."

John smiled. "I don't see much wrong with your suit."

"You wouldn't, of course. Nobody thinks about dress in Sedgebury. People are so used to seeing you in that old frock-coat that they'd notice it if you changed it."

"Hodgetts made your suit, didn't he? He's a patient, and I've gone to him for years. He's the best tailor in Dulston. Your mother always said his materials were excellent. They certainly wear well."

"Oh, his materials are all right, Dad. It's his awful cut. And if you go on wearing the same clothes day after day they never keep their shape."

"Well, order yourself a new suit in North Bromwich and tell them to send me the bill."

"That's awfully kind of you, Dad; but I'd much

sooner have an allowance and pay for the clothes myself."

"An allowance? How much do you want, Matthew?"

"George Perks, whose father's a doctor like you, manages on fifty a year."

"Manages? I should think he did! Fifty pounds is a lot of money. It's nearly as much as I paid for my board and lodgings when I was a student. It's half what I got for working all day as an unqualified assistant. I shall have to think about this, Matthew. Look here, if I give you forty pounds a year to keep yourself in clothes and pocket-money, I shall want you to promise me one thing faithfully, Matthew . . ."

"Of course, Dad, I'll promise anything."

"If you run into debt, as you probably will—I couldn't; in my time I wouldn't have dared to ask anyone for credit—will you give me your word that you'll tell me as soon as you're entangled?"

"I shan't run into debt if I have forty pounds a year. I'm sure I can manage on that. I quite realize that it seems a lot to you, but times have changed, Dad."

Indeed times had changed, John Bradley thought as he lay in bed thinking over the matter that night. What would Matthew have thought of him if he could have seen him as he was in his student-days—that uncouth, rustic figure in hob-nailed boots, growing out of the Sunday suit the tailor in Hereford had made

him? No doubt he and his friends would have placed him at a glance among the "impossibles." Yet Lacey, he thought, had not done so. But then Lacey, no doubt, was as exceptional in that as in everything else; there was nobody like him and probably never would be.

He had several times lately felt slightly worried by what Matthew said of his new friends. The idea of this not very intelligent public-school set disquieted him. He remembered a hint the headmaster of Brunston had dropped about Matthew's inclination to surround himself with inferior boys whose admiration he could command without any effort. There was, again, in the boy's contempt for the "mixed lot," as he called it, a suggestion of that snobbishness, so alien to John's nature, which Matthew had picked up unconsciously or inherited from Clara. That was a disappointment: he had imagined that the cold douche he had administered when he spoke of his own humble origins would have cured all that nonsense. Of course one must make allowances: Matthew was still no more than a boy; but he looked forward to the day—not so very distant, thank heaven!—when he would begin his hospital work and come under Lacey's influence.

Then he began—as he often did in the middle of the night—to think about money. He considered the allowance of forty pounds a year which he had promised Matthew that evening, and wondered if he

had been wise. There had been no affectation in his astonishment at the figure. He had never yet lost his peasant's habit of rigid economy, that instinctive, reluctant, weighing of every penny he spent which had been forced on him by necessity in his own early days—not only in North Bromwich but also in Sedgebury, where, only yesterday, as it seemed, he had been conscious of a sensation of giddy extravagance when he paid out twenty pounds for Clara's piano.

After all, he supposed, he had really no need to be so concerned about money. With the completion of the Sedgebury Main Colliery, the industrial rise of Sedgebury and with it the expansion of his own practice, had reached its natural limit. Since the Colliery had started work and the hundreds of men engaged in its development had drifted away elsewhere, the town's population had diminished and his income appreciably declined. Though he could not complain of his own position or deny that he had a fair share of the amount of practice available, he was actually working harder and for less money than he had done a few years since. When he settled in Sedgebury, he had been unopposed. The first threat to this fortunate monopoly had been the establishment of a branch surgery by his old rivals from Mawne Heath who had put up their plates in the High Street; yet this opposition, formidable though it had seemed, had scarcely affected his progress—the growth of Sedgebury had more than offset the effects of increasing competition;

there was still room for all three of them, and he held his own.

But now, since the fame of Furnival's great undertaking had spread abroad, since Sedgebury had come to be regarded as a place with a golden future, no less than three new opponents, all Scotsmen, had dropped out of the sky, as it were, and set up in practice. One, a middle-aged man named Shaw, had actually regularized his position by buying a share in the Mawne Heath practice and becoming its third partner. The other two were "squatters" who had decided to put up their plates and take their chance. There was no reason, John Bradley felt, why they shouldn't. There was certainly room for one of them. At the time of their invasion he had all the work he could possibly handle himself, and had even contemplated employing a qualified assistant to help him out.

It was not his new opponents' presence in Sedgebury that he objected to so much as their methods. In the old days of his rivalry with Findlay and Wills and Altrincham-Harris, all the three men concerned had conducted themselves with the greatest ethical decorum. The invaders from Glasgow, Boyle and Macrae (no truck with hyphens here!) were apparently unaware that such conventions existed. They fell upon Sedgebury like a couple of starved dogs, snarling, baring their teeth and snapping at one another, only united as a pack in their hatred of the men whom they found in possession—and particularly of John Bradley.

If one of his patients or Harris's fell into their clutches by accident, no power on earth could induce them to let go, while each took the opportunity of improving the occasion by demonstrating his own skill and his rival's defects. Both these men, before they descended on Sedgebury, had been "sixpenny doctors" running lock-up surgeries in the North Bromwich slums. No sooner had they arrived than they started cutting prices, suggesting, by implication, that the patients of the established practices were being fleeced and that no conscientious doctor could ask more than a shilling for consultation and medicine or two for a visit, and letting the secretaries of the Friendly Societies know that they were willing to undertake contract work at a lower capital fee than that which John accepted.

In the palmy days of the Sedgebury Main's development the machinations of these bandits gave him little trouble. He was well-known and firmly established; if any of his patients objected to his fees, they were at liberty to leave him and trust their lives to the problematical care of newcomers. It was significant that several who forsook him in this manner came back to him. But now that the population of Sedgebury was beginning to decline, the menace of the cheap doctors' competition became more serious: they were feeling the pinch even more than he, and the instinct of self-preservation obliterated any scruples they might ever have had.

Into this dog-fight, already so little to John's taste,

the Sedgebury Main Colliery Company (in other words: Mr. Furnival) had now tossed an additional bone of contention by purchasing Jubilee House, which Aaron Sanders had vacated, and presenting it to the town as a Cottage Hospital. Like most of Furnival's munificences, the gift was double-edged: it gave his company widespread and moderately inexpensive publicity; it was convenient—and almost necessary—in any case, to have a hospital ready to receive mining accidents within easy reach of the pit-head, and desirable, from his point of view, that such a convenience should be equipped and maintained at the public expense.

The opening of the new Cottage Hospital only added to John Bradley's embarrassments. Naturally enough, since the gift had been made to the town, all the doctors already established in Sedgebury had an equal right to serve on the staff, with the result that, although he enjoyed the useless privilege of seniority, he actually found himself in a minority of three to one, with the newcomers solidly ranged against him. Furthermore, during the twenty years that had passed since he qualified, great changes had taken place in the conditions of general practice. In his day, Surgery had been the special prerogative of the consultant; no ordinary practitioner like himself, had ever dared to embark on a major operation. Now, thanks to the Listerian revolution, the practice of surgery had been made safe, and young men brought up in the new

school, such as Boyle and Macrae, were not merely ready but qualified to operate in an emergency. Boyle, indeed, in spite of his ethical shortcomings, was a shrewd, knowledgeable fellow and a daring, competent surgeon. No sooner was the hospital opened than he eagerly leapt into the limelight and established for himself a surgical reputation which John Bradley had neither the skill nor the courage to emulate, giving tangible proof to the theory which, from the beginning of the contest, he and his friends had lost no chance of disseminating: that John, though, no doubt, an honest and likeable man, was, medically, a "back number" and surgically beneath contempt.

Was that possibly true? he asked himself. Had he fallen behind through sheer, complacent negligence? How could a man work twelve hours a day and read as well? True or false, the result was that now, in the prime of his life, at a time when he should surely have been able to count on the financial security and the leisure his labours had earned for him, he found himself actually less secure and faced by a keener competition than ever before. No wonder he lay awake at night and thought about money, counting over the tale of his assets again and again, reckoning how much the house and the practice would realize in the case of a death-vacancy, wondering how Matthew would fare if he died, as his predecessor Harbord had died, in the midst of the struggle! These sombre speculations, he told himself, were, in part, the result of

loneliness. If Clara had still been alive, lying there beside him, if—still that dream revisited him—he had married Mary Sanders, he could have turned to either of them for consolation and would not have been left to fight these chimeras alone. Though he assured himself that he had acted for the best, that the joy of Matthew's companionship justified his willing sacrifice, he knew in his heart that it was not good for a man of his age to live without woman; that, for all he had gained, there was something to which he was entitled missing in his life.

But, after all, when the dark recurrent mood had been mastered, the future was not so black as, at times, it seemed. He was a healthy man and came of a long-lived race. He had no reason to suppose that he was likely to die before his time. Even if he did, the house and the practice would almost certainly fetch fifteen hundred pounds, while three thousand Sedgebury Main Ordinaries at thirty shillings (the stock had appreciated since he bought it) would bring Matthew's available capital up to five thousand pounds—more than five times as much as the sum on which he had founded his own fortunes! If he could keep that sum and its interest intact—there was no chance of saving more, so far as he could see—holding his own through the five years of Matthew's curriculum, and one for the Fellowship, and the two or three more which should be devoted to post-graduate study and research, there seemed no reason why he should not see

his son realize the ambitions on which he had set his heart.

Yet six years and three more, when he imagined them stretched before him on end, seemed a long time to wait and possess one's soul in patience.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

(1)

THE first year came to an end. Matthew sat for his first M.B. examination in Chemistry, Physics and Biology, and failed.

John Bradley found it hard to believe the news when he heard it: he had so accustomed himself to considering Matthew an intellectual prodigy that the possibility of such a misfortune—that was how he thought of it—had never entered his mind. The fact that he himself had failed in his first attempt at his “final” did not console him: when he considered the disadvantages under which he had laboured during his student career it sometimes seemed to him miraculous that he had managed to pass any examination at all. Matthew’s case was different: he was not only better equipped by nature, but had also, from early childhood, been blessed with every kind of educational advantage. The lapse was incomprehensible.

Matthew himself took his failure much more calmly. He was not in the least discouraged, but appeared to regard it as an Act of God, for which he was in no way responsible. With any reasonable luck he considered he would have passed. The exam. had

been fair enough. It just happened that the papers had caught him on his weak points. Next time he would leave nothing to chance.

"As a matter of fact, I treated the whole thing too lightly," he said. "There's no doubt I might have worked a little bit harder; but it's not much fun sweating at subjects in which you're not interested. All this preliminary scientific stuff is so boring. It doesn't lead anywhere. If it were really useful one wouldn't grudge the time and the energy one has to spend on it; but what earthly use is it for a chap who's going to be a doctor and deal with human bodies to waste a whole blessed year making horrid smells in a lab. and dissecting stinking dogfish and putrid rabbits?"

In some ways John Bradley felt inclined to agree. He could argue—and did—that the purpose of these malodorous studies in comparative anatomy was to familiarize the student with routine laboratory methods. Matthew's case against the dogfish (quite apart from its stink) was logically unanswerable; but so, too, was that for the examining body, which, rightly or wrongly, insisted on students being acquainted with the dogfish's structure before permitting them to embark on studies more strictly relevant.

Matthew was not, he explained with some satisfaction, alone in his failure. His chief friend, George Perks, had also "come down," and with him two other members of the public-school "set" with whom he was

proud to associate himself. John Bradley did not find this equally reassuring. He was beginning to be a little suspicious of Mr. Perks, whose father gave him fifty pounds a year pocket-money and allowed him to run up bills at his tailor's. It seemed to him significant when he learnt that every one of the "outsiders" in that "rather mixed lot" had apparently managed to get through. In this, at least, he found some wry satisfaction. He had once been an "outsider" himself.

"But then," Matthew explained, "all these chaps have the luck to be living in North Bromwich. They don't have to waste more than three hours every day travelling to and fro in a fuggy railway-carriage and cycling to the station as well. I don't think you realize how disturbing that is, Dad. Others fellows have much more time for reading than I have."

"Can't you read in the train?"

"Not travelling third class, like I do. You try it and see!"

"It cuts both ways, doesn't it? You see, if you lived in North Bromwich, there'd be many more things to distract you than there are here. And you wouldn't have me to help you either—for what that may be worth."

"I shouldn't be completely tired out and drugged with foul air by the time I got home."

"Your friend George Perks lives in Alvaston, doesn't he? The fact that he isn't compelled to waste

time in the train, as you call it, doesn't seem to have helped him much."

"Oh well, that's no real argument, Dad. George Perks is an awful ass in any case. I doubt if he'll ever pass any exam.—unless the examiners get so sick of the sight of him that they simply push him through to get rid of him."

"If he's such an awful ass as all that, I wonder why you're so friendly."

Matthew laughed. "Well, George is a decent old fool and a gentleman anyway—-which is more than you can say of most of them. You like people because they like you, not because they're clever. If that were the only reason for liking people life'd be pretty dull. It's dull enough in Sedgebury in any case."

"If it weren't, my dear boy, you'd do even less work at home than you do!"

He was sorry, a moment later, that he had said that. For the first time since their reconciliation he saw in Matthew's eyes the old, dangerous look of obstinacy. He hastened to soften his words.

"I don't mean that you haven't worked at home. I'm not blaming you, Matthew. Only, naturally, I'm a bit disappointed."

"Well, goodness knows, so am I. I thought it would be a walk-over. But when you passed your 'first' you weren't living in Sedgebury, Dad, were you?"

No, he hadn't been living in Sedgebury, John

Bradley thought. His mind returned ironically to that icy garret looking down on the yard at the back of the "Cock and Magpie" where, with numb limbs wrapped in a blanket, he had sat at his trestle-table, unable to work—unable even to sleep—for the noise of the house-breakers clearing a way for the new Corporation Street. Compared with these discomforts, the conditions in which his son lived and worked were easy indeed. Yet the old look in Matthew's dark eyes and his touchy mood warned him that this was no time for recrimination or even for argument. In any case he had no intention of discussing the question towards which—and not for the first time—he was being edged: whether it wouldn't be of advantage to Matthew's work if he were allowed to go into lodgings in North Bromwich? After this failure John felt it more than ever important to keep an eye on him, to give him the benefit of his help and guidance, to correct what he already believed to be the unfavourable influence of George Perks and his other friends. Some day, when he had the time, he told himself, he would make it his business to have a look at this easy-going young man whose name occupied such a preponderant space in Matthew's conversation.

In the meantime, the financial aspect of this bad start disquieted him. Apart from all else—and he refused to accept it as a sample of what he must be prepared to accept in the future—it meant that the whole of the money he had apportioned to Matthew's first

year had been wasted. There was nothing to be done but to cut this loss and begin all over again. And during this lost year, he was compelled to admit, his income had been falling. Not through any fault of his own. When he came to examine the causes, he perceived how closely his own prosperity had always reflected that of Sedgebury. When trade boomed and industry thrived, up went the weekly takings. When a slump came—and the slump of the year nineteen hundred and five, the trough between the wave-tops of the bicycle boom and the rising motor-industry, was the deepest in local memory—private medical practice revealed itself as a luxury-trade and reacted early. Of course the “clubs” remained, as they had always been, the mainstay of his livelihood. They were the one source of regular income on which he could count without fail, the one vested interest which, so far, his envious opponents had been unable to touch.

Yet even in this preserve the competition of Boyle and Macrae was beginning to make itself felt, thanks largely to the attitude of Mr. Furnival towards the New Cottage Hospital. Though John Bradley had never liked Furnival personally—his quiet nature instinctively shrinking from too close contact with the engineer’s overwhelming personality—he had remained, up till now, on friendly terms with him and had continued to act as his doctor, attending his wife and family for a number of minor ailments and acquitting himself, so far as he knew, satisfactorily. The

opening of the Cottage Hospital altered this relationship. The new institution was only part of the grandiose system of co-ordinated activities which Furnival had conceived as radiating from the centre of the Sedgebury Main. Though it was supported by voluntary contributions, he regarded it as part of the colliery's property and subject, as such, to the undisputed power which he exercised as managing director over everything that fell within his grasp. Even the medical staff, of which John was the senior member, must submit to his guidance and abide by his decrees.

From the first John Bradley had kicked against this lay dictatorship. In his own sphere, Humphrey Furnival was, without doubt, a remarkable man and worthy of respect; so far as the administration and finances of the hospital were concerned, John was ready to defer to his superior knowledge and give him his way; but when it came to Furnival's interfering with the medical part of the concern, for which he had no technical qualifications, John felt it his duty to stand firm and hold his own. During the first two years of the Cottage Hospital's existence there had been two minor clashes between them, from which Furnival had retired slightly shocked, it seemed, that anyone in Sedgebury could fail to agree with him. But Furnival, as all his business rivals and associates knew, had a long memory for the slightest differences. Had he been less simple-minded, John Bradley would have realized that a bone remained to be picked, and that Furnival,

without doubt, would choose the occasion for picking it.

One afternoon he received an urgent message: Mr. Furnival wished to see him at once. Taking it for granted that one of the children had fallen ill—they were always ailing—he rode up on his bicycle to the Manager's house to find that the summons was not professional. Probably, Mrs. Furnival suggested, her husband, who was still at the office, had wanted to see him on business. In that case, John thought to himself, the message might well have been phrased less peremptorily; but as the office lay on his way home and three-quarters of an hour had been wasted already, he felt he might just as well call in and find out what was wanted. Furnival received him patronizingly, as if he were a junior employee, against the impressive background of the new board-room about the cost of which the Sedgebury Main shareholders had not unreasonably complained.

"Ah, there you are, Bradley," he said. "I sent for you a couple of hours ago."

"I went to the house as soon as I got your message. I'm sorry you're seedy. What's wrong?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Know anything about a man named Alfred Barnett?"

"Yes. He's one of my club-patients: an Oddfellow I think. He came to see me last night. He's ruptured himself underground: got mixed up with a trolley or something. It's a perfectly straightforward case; nothing urgent about it. An operation will soon put

him right. I'm sending him in to Lacey at the Prince's for a Radical Cure."

"So I hear. Yes . . . That's why I sent for you. What's wrong with the Cottage Hospital, Bradley? What's the use of my firm having put down three thousand pounds for the house and spent another two on equipping the operating-theatre, if you send every trifling case that comes into your hands to North Bromwich? That kind of thing has happened again and again. It must stop. The Sedgebury Cottage Hospital is becoming a laughing-stock, and I'm not going to have it, d'you see? I'm not going to have it!"

John smiled. "My dear Furnival, it's no use your talking like that. The fact that your firm presented the hospital to the town has nothing to do with me. We're very grateful to you: that's the beginning and end of it. If you've any complaint as to how the hospital is managed, you can bring the matter up at a general committee-meeting. As to how the medical officers use their judgment—well, if you'll allow me to put it plainly, that's just not the committee's business—and it certainly isn't yours."

"I intend to make it my business to see that this hospital's properly used."

"It is properly used. As far as that goes, it's already practically run—on public subscriptions, mark you—for the benefit of your firm. Every accident case that comes out of your pit is taken there first as a matter

of course. In the last year it's dealt with a score of surgical emergencies. If this case had been one of strangulated hernia, in which the patient needed an immediate operation to save his life, he'd have been admitted and dealt with at once. But, as a matter of fact, this is not an emergency. I'm sending Barnett into North Bromwich because I consider it's to his advantage to undergo his Radical Cure in a General Hospital where hundreds of such operations are performed every year. He'll come back in six weeks as good a man as ever he was. You can trust Lacey for that."

Furnival screwed up his eyes maliciously.

"Oh, I'm not distrusting Lacey," he said with a leer. "Oh no, not in the least. I'm merely intrigued by your confession—or implied confession—that you yourself, the senior member of our staff, are not a competent surgeon. I'm glad you've saved me the trouble of telling you this in so many words by admitting it frankly. Now we know where we are."

John Bradley controlled himself with difficulty.

"No, I don't think you do quite know where you are, Mr. Furnival," he said. "That's part of the trouble. You're not—and you never will be—in a position to instruct me or any other medical officer how to deal with his patients. You're not in a position—unless you care to take the risk of an action at law—to criticise me in my professional capacity. I've acted, in the case of this man Barnett, and I shall act again,

according to my judgment. The responsibility is mine, and nobody else's. He'll be operated on, under perfect conditions, by the most skilful surgeon in North Bromwich. I've arranged for him to go into the Prince's Hospital to-morrow."

Furnival smiled and shook his head.

"In that case, I think you'd better cancel the arrangement."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"As you wish. I merely suggest that it would be politer to do so."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You soon will." Furnival chuckled maliciously. "I sent Barnett into the Cottage Hospital this afternoon. He'll be operated on to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"By whom?"

"By Dr. Boyle. Macrae gives the anæsthetic."

"But the man's a club-patient of mine."

"That's beside the point. This is nothing whatever to do with his club. He goes in as a private patient at the company's expense. It's always been part of our policy to look after our workmen. We're responsible for his injury under the new Employers' Liability Act, and we're going to see him through. That's all about it."

"But I tell you, the man's my patient. Dr. Boyle has no right . . ."

"That's no concern of mine. You mustn't expect

me to feel very strongly about these fine points of medical etiquette. Really, Bradley, I can't see that you have anything to grumble about. You'll get this poor man's four shillings a year, or whatever it is, just the same. You've advised him that an operation is necessary, but you obviously funk doing the operation yourself and tell him he'll have to get somebody else to do it: in other words, you've already done as much as you're prepared to do for him: your responsibility's over; you've washed your hands of him."

"He's still my patient."

"You mean he's still a member of one of your clubs. Now look here, Bradley: I know nothing whatever about your medical taboos, and in any case I've no intention of being influenced—much less bound—by them; but, speaking as an ignorant layman I must confess it seems to me only fair that a sick man should have the right to dispose of his own body."

"I'm not disputing that."

"In other words: if this fellow Barnett prefers going into the Cottage Hospital, next door to his home, to being pushed off to North Bromwich, ten miles away, it's his own affair, isn't it?"

"He decided to go to North Bromwich yesterday."

"Never mind about yesterday. I saw Barnett this morning and put the alternatives to him. He prefers to stay in Sedgebury, and I can't say I blame him. Then I told Dr. Boyle the circumstances of the case and asked him if he would kindly do the operation on

our behalf. He consented, and there it is. I suppose you don't want to suggest that the company isn't within its rights in employing any surgeon it wants to employ without asking your permission?"

"Boyle had no right to accept the case without telling me first."

"Oh, well, these complications are quite beyond me. That's a question between Dr. Boyle and yourself."

"And that's how I propose to treat it."

"Very good, very good." Furnival nodded his red-maned head and smiled wolfishly. "How these doctors love one another! I've noticed that before. However, no doubt Dr. Boyle will be able to explain his position better than I can. A smart young fellow, Boyle."

"Yes . . . rather too smart for my liking," John Bradley said grimly.

He cycled away in angry haste to find Boyle. It seemed likely to be an unsatisfactory interview, for, even from the strictly ethical standpoint, the case, as Furnival had presented it, was by no means clear. By the time he reached Boyle's surgery his first anger had cooled. Boyle and Macrae received him together. As he entered the room they exchanged significant glances. He had a feeling that his visit was not unexpected and that they had already decided what line to take. Probably Furnival had telephoned to them from his office and warned them of what was in the air.

"Well, well," Boyle said heartily; "this is a pleasant surprise! The first time we've had the honour, I think. Sit down, Bradley, sit down."

"I shan't keep you more than a moment. I've come about Alfred Barnett."

"Alfred Barnett?" Boyle knitted his sandy brows and appeared to be puzzled. Macrae did the same. "Alfred Barnett? Ah, yes—that case of inguinal hernia. He came to see me this morning."

"You mean: Furnival sent him to see you."

Boyle blinked. "Of course. That's the man. One of Furnival's workmen, isn't he?"

"He's a club-patient of mine."

"Yes, yes. It's coming back to me. You advised him to see a surgeon, didn't you? As a matter of fact I mentioned the case to Macrae—you remember, Malcolm?—and intended to write to you about him this evening."

"No doubt. But don't you think it's rather a pity that I should have heard you were proposing to operate on him from another quarter?"

"I'm sorry you feel like that, Bradley," Boyle said smoothly. "After all I had nothing to report except that the fellow had come to me and asked me to operate on him at the Sedgebury Main Colliery's expense. From what Barnett told me this morning it seemed quite clear that, as far as the operation was concerned, you were out of the case. Of course, if I'm misinformed, if you intended to operate . . ."

"I didn't intend to operate. I'd fixed up a bed for him with Lacey at Prince's."

"Precisely. That's what I gathered. And he preferred to stay nearer home. Have you any objection?"

"I can't object to your operating—though really you ought to have got in touch with me before you undertook to deal with him. But I do object, and most strongly, to Furnival's interfering with my affairs."

"If you feel like that, Bradley, you'd better tell him so. It isn't exactly my business, is it?"

"I consider it's very much your business, Boyle. If once we start letting a layman meddle with our practices and trying to set us by the ears, there'll be no end of trouble. I've been practising here for the best part of twenty years. You and Macrae are relatively newcomers. Once or twice I've felt you were not quite playing the game."

"Come, come!"

"Oh, you know very well what I mean, and so does Macrae. But I'm a peaceful person: I've no intention of raking up old scores and starting a dog-fight. What I do want to say is this: Here we are, six presumably reasonable persons practising medicine in Sedgebury. Between ourselves we may easily have differences—in a place where competition is so keen that's probably inevitable—but when it comes to outsiders like Furnival interfering in purely medical affairs, I do think you'll agree with me that we ought to show a united front and be candid with one another."

Boyle smiled uneasily. "My dear Bradley, that's all very well. As you say, we're competitors and there's no disguising the fact. You've been here longer than any of us. You're firmly established. You have all the clubs."

"After all, I paid for them. I bought my practice, remember."

"Yes, yes, I know all about that. The fact remains that you have this advantage over us. If you grudge Macrae and myself the chance of doing work that we're able to do and you aren't—in other words practising surgery—well, I can only say you're a bit of a dog in the manger. You don't dispute my right to operate on this man Barnett at Furnival's request?"

"Not at all. I dispute the propriety of Furnival's asking you, and of you and Furnival arranging the whole affair behind my back."

"In that case I'm afraid neither Macrae nor myself can see eye to eye with you. I'm sorry. But there it is. Of course, if you wish to be present at the operation . . ."

"Many thanks for the invitation. I'm afraid I'm too busy. We'll leave it at that."

He had to leave it at that. As he departed John Bradley realized that, apart from Boyle's ethical lapse in not communicating with him, he had no valid grievance. There was no questioning the subtlety with which Furnival had taken his revenge for their differences of opinion over the Cottage Hospital. John's doubts as

to Boyle's surgical capacity were indeed somewhat justified, when, a few months later, the man Barnett returned with the broken-down wound of a "cure" that was by no means "radical" and had to be sent to North Bromwich to have it patched up again; but Furnival, as he might have known, was not the man to content himself with a single tactical victory. He had not finished with him. As creator of the Sedgebury Main he had arrogated to himself dictatorial powers over all persons and things that came within its orbit; when he met opposition of any kind he was ruthless until he had crushed it, and took a savage pleasure in watching the effects of each blow he dealt. In the Barnett case, no doubt, Boyle had whipped up Furnival's anger by maliciously exaggerating John's indignation and misrepresenting his attitude. Whatever he may have said or done, it soon became obvious that Furnival was out for blood and would lose no opportunity of harming his reputation and making life difficult for him.

Furnival did nothing by halves. First of all he did all he could to discredit and harass him on their original battlefield, the Hospital Committee-room: not very successfully, for in technical questions John Bradley was the better armed and the majority of the Committee were patients whom he had known and treated for years and who were beginning, in any case, with their native Sedgebury obstinacy, to resent the foreigner Furnival's attempted domination. Next, as

soon as the opportunity occurred, Furnival called in Boyle and Macrae to attend his own family and took care to let the whole neighbourhood know that he had "changed his doctor" and was congratulating himself on the change.

This was a heavy blow to John Bradley's prestige, but one even heavier followed. Furnival embarked on a private insurance scheme which, on the face of it, appeared to be consistent with his known policy of centralizing all the Sedgebury Main's activities, designed to cover every man who worked in the pit and its subsidiary undertakings. It was, in effect, a new club—The Sedgebury Mutual Aid Society—which offered (thanks to the subsidy the firm provided) a higher scale of benefits in return for smaller contributions than those usually paid to the local Friendly Societies. When the club had been formed, Furnival invited applications for the post of Medical Officer. John Bradley did not apply, he knew from the first that the firm of Boyle and Macrae would be appointed, since it was for the purpose of furthering Furnival's vendetta that the club had been formed.

At the end of the next quarter John Bradley's own club-secretaries came to him in a body with long faces. The employees of the Sedgebury Main group accounted for more than a third of their membership, and a large majority of these had elected to join Furnival's Mutual Aid Society. It was difficult, they said, to compete with the Colliery Club's attractions.

Apart from its higher disability pay and the suggestion that, later on, its benefits might be extended to the members' wives and families, the doctors had agreed to accept three shillings a head *per annum* instead of the four shillings customary in the district. Would he consent to come into line with the other doctors? The fewer members a club had, the more difficult it was to keep going. If he didn't help them in this, the drift to the Mutual Aid Society was likely to increase, and they would be compelled, in spite of his long association with them, to throw the appointment of their medical officer open to competition.

John Bradley consented to dock his annual fee by a shilling, and lost, at one blow, a quarter of his income from contract practice.

But this was not enough. In spite of the readjusted fee the drift in the direction of Furnival's club continued. It hurt John Bradley to feel that the mass of his patients, to whom he was so deeply attached, regarded him with so little personal loyalty; but, to tell the truth, the nature of his practice had changed. It was nearly twenty years since he had begun work in Sedgebury. The middle-aged men of those days were now dead or old and past work; the influx of strangers had swamped the original population of "difficult" but loyal folk who knew him and trusted him, and these strangers, working for the most part in Furnival's concerns, knew very well on which side their bread was buttered. Furthermore, the apparently benevolent

autocracy of Furnival was tempered by an elaborate system of espionage. He held that those of his workmen who were not for him were against him; and his employees were quick to realize that no man was looked on favourably who did not belong to what was now generally known as "The Colliery Club." The old Friendly Societies suffered accordingly. By the end of another year John Bradley's club-membership, his one stable source of income, was diminished by half. There seemed every probability of its shrinking even further, so long as the Sedgebury Main Colliery continued to expand and to flourish. And Boyle and Macrae, who understood the uses of advertisement better than he, had blossomed out into a motor-car.

(II)

Well, Sedgebury Main Ordinaries had paid a good dividend anyway. That was one consolation. John Bradley had another, even more heartening. In spite of his affectation of nonchalance, Matthew's pride had been pricked by his failure to pass his "first." After a vacation spent in irritating indolence, in which John guessed he was "showing off," he set to work with a will. John Bradley offered to read with him in the evenings and was not rejected. The experience gave him not only enormous pleasure in Matthew's com-

panionship but also a sense of virtue in "brushing-up" a part of the curriculum which he was astonished to find he had completely forgotten. As a result of their joint application Matthew passed his examination—not brilliantly, but quite respectably—in the following July.

"Well, thank God that's over," he said. "It was a bit of a shaky start, but I shall probably get honours next year in Anatomy and Physiology."

"There's no reason at all why you shouldn't," John said, "if you choose to work."

"I don't mind working, Dad, when I'm really interested in a subject."

"What's happened to your friend George Perks?"

"Oh, he's down again, poor old devil. To tell you the truth I doubt if he'll ever get through. There's some idea now of his changing over to the Faculty of Brewing."

"From what you've told me, I should say that your friend 'll be much less dangerous as a brewer than as a doctor."

"I don't know about that. He'll certainly make much more money. His father attends Sir Joseph Astill, and he'll push him on like anything. Why have you always had such an awful 'down' on poor old George, Dad? You don't even know him. I think that's beastly unfair."

"I've only judged him by what you've told me about him. By your own account he seems to me

pretty poor stuff, and I'm not at all sorry to hear that you're likely to see less of him."

"Even if he does change over I expect I shall see a good deal of him. The Faculty of Brewing's in the same building as ours, and I don't scrap my friends just because they don't happen to do well in exams.," Matthew added indignantly.

"Well, let's say no more about it. There's one good thing anyway: I can help you a lot more with Anatomy than I could with Chemistry and Physics."

"I should stand a far better chance of doing well, all the same, if I didn't have to waste time over this filthy railway journey."

John shook his head. "This has been a bad year, my boy. Later on, when you're doing your hospital work, we may have to come to it. But at present, even if I thought it was right, I couldn't afford to put you into 'digs' in North Bromwich."

"But you don't think it's right? In other words you don't trust me. You're the only person in the world, Dad, who continues to treat me as if I were still a small child. I'm not a child, you know; and I do rather resent it."

Perhaps, John Bradley reflected, the accusation was just and Matthew had some right to resent his attitude. After all, at a corresponding age, he himself had been fit to "look after himself" and had escaped the "temptations" of town life, so darkly adumbrated by Mr. Samuel Smiles, without much difficulty. That

was one of the natural defects of parenthood: an inability to see one's children as anything but children. Compelling himself to consider Matthew with unprejudiced eyes, he perceived that his son, like himself, had already reached a precocious manhood. He was, in fact, an extremely mature young man: tall, powerfully made, and self-possessed in a degree which, even now, his father could not emulate; handsome, too, and so smart in the blue serge reefer suit of North Bromwich cut, with a starched three-inch double collar and a knitted tie of red silk (which the moment's fashion decreed to be more correct than the chromatic outrage denoting an Old Brunstonian) that John Bradley, meeting him at the station or walking home beside him, became conscious, quite unreasonably, as he assured himself, of the shabbiness of his own frayed collar and cuffs, and the unfashionableness of the greenish-black frock-coat which he continued to wear because, in the days when he started practice, this garment had been the recognized uniform of a medical man. Once or twice, indeed, Matthew had suggested tactfully that this formal costume was no longer necessary, reminding him that even the "honoraries" at Prince's wore lounge-suits or morning coats with cut-away tails; but John Bradley, by now, was becoming middle-aged and a creature of habit; his life ran in a familiar groove, he resented all change; though his clothes offended Matthew's sense of propriety, they were what he was used to; so long as they lasted no

power on earth would make him discard them—and however lamentable Mr. Hodgetts' cut might be, his materials, as he had already remarked, wore for ever.

It was natural enough, he supposed, that Matthew should want to be as well-dressed as his fellow students, though he himself had never felt that necessity, having been too desperately concerned with the task of getting qualified to think about anything else. Times and standards had doubtless changed and appearances counted more than they had done in his days; this handsome young man with his public-school education was in a very different position from the uncouth hobbledohoy who had lodged at the "Cock and Magpie" and tramped to the hospital every day in his rustic boots; and though the complexity of Matthew's wardrobe somewhat alarmed him when he thought of the inroads its cost must surely make on his slender allowance, in the back of his mind John Bradley was proud of his smartness. He was not alone in his consciousness of his son's good looks: not only from the compliments his female patients paid them, but also from the interest and admiration they obviously aroused on the pavements of Sedgbury, he perceived that Matthew was becoming attractive to women. Was Matthew aware of this? John Bradley asked himself. It was hard to tell. So far, at any rate, he had shown no symptoms of any romantic attachment, though that meant very little—the boy was by

nature secretive as well as shy. All John Bradley could hope and pray for was that no diversion of this kind, however natural or "suitable," might play havoc with his work; for time was short, and money—thanks to the lost year—even shorter.

For the moment, at any rate, all seemed to be going well. Matthew had tasted success of a kind, and his pride was involved in its continuance. For a whole year they worked together, and though the more recent developments of Physiology were unknown to him, John Bradley renewed the passion for Anatomy which had been born in him twenty-eight years ago amid the dust of "Dr." Mortimore's bony relics. Here, at last, for the first time in their lives, he had the satisfaction of displaying himself as Matthew's superior. He was astonished to find the ease and certainty with which his old skill returned to him. Even his memory, which, for lack of use, had seemed to be losing its brightness, rose to the occasion: obscure anatomical details, which he had never needed to remember in more than a quarter of a century of general practice, revealed themselves neatly docketed and stored away in the recesses of his mind and emerged automatically on demand. Encouraged and reasonably elated by these freakish feats of memory which earned him Matthew's respect, he was secretly compelled to admit that these stores of meticulous detail impressed so early on a brain which, until it received them, had been no more than a blank sheet, were, in fact, the only pure scientific learning

he had acquired. All the rest of his professional equipment—and for practical purposes the most important part of it—had been learnt by the light of nature, observation, and (occasionally bitter) clinical experience: apart from them he was a rusty ignoramus. Indeed, since the time of Lacey's departure to London, he was forced to confess that he had chosen the easier path and abandoned all interest in science for its own sake. It was a damning confession; yet, after all, what did it matter? As general practitioners went he was not, he believed, such a very bad doctor; while these scraps of pure knowledge, indelibly and miraculously preserved, were sufficient to serve his immediate purpose as Matthew's tutor in Osteology.

This was the only subject in the whole of the medical curriculum in which he had excelled; so down came Captain Kidd from his icy attic, to dangle gruesomely, much to Emma's disgust, in the little living-room—she was still known as "the doctor's girl," though by now she was almost certainly rising sixty—and out of John's memory of the past there arose, with all the heart-breaking poignancy of small things, the tones of "Dr." Mortimore's voice, the sound of the words he had uttered, the smell of his witch's kitchen, and sometimes a startling vision of the odd little man himself, his bald head protruding from the blankets in which he sat huddled, and one grubby skeletal finger outstretched to emphasize the points he was making.

First eyes and then hands . . . The precept was as right in its fundamentals to-day, John thought, as when he first uttered it; so he made Matthew "learn his bones" by handling them with closed eyes, as that old ruffian had taught him to "learn" them, until his fingers knew the shape of every one of them by touch—every groove that marked the track of a tendon, every ridge or asperity which signified the site of a muscle's origin or insertion. He did more than this, explaining, as they progressed, not merely the mechanics of muscular action, but the reasons why it was important to know the relations of the soft tissues to the bony frame: how, in setting a fracture, it was necessary that certain bony points should be placed in line; how the displacement or enlargement of an organ—heart, liver or spleen—could be perceived by the abnormality of its relations to points of the bony skeleton; how the course of a nerve or artery could be mapped by the same fixed bearings—all those practical applications of osteology which, had he been taught them in his own second year, would have made the subject significant instead of seeming to be no more than a catalogue of dry facts of purely academic interest and doubtful utility. All Anatomy, he now realized, should be taught from the first as Clinical Anatomy; to treat it otherwise was like fitting in the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle without having any idea of the picture they composed. If he had been made to see this in the days when he was a student his

anatomical studies would have been not merely more interesting, but much more useful.

So he worked every night with Matthew, explaining to him, step by step, the reasons why this or that fact, apparently insignificant in itself, would some day be important; and, apart from the delight he found in the boy's quick reactions and infectious enthusiasm, his method of sustaining interest was justified. Matthew took a First Class in Anatomy and a pass in Physiology in the following June. A proud day for both of them! for, though he willingly permitted Matthew to take the full credit for this achievement, John Bradley knew how much he had contributed to it himself. The false start was forgotten: the programme began to run smoothly.

"And now for the Primary Fellowship!" he said. "If we carry on work from this point, while everything's fresh in our minds, you ought to be able to manage it easily."

"I think I deserve a bit of a holiday, Dad. I don't want to go stale, you know."

"Well, perhaps you are right. A week or two oughtn't to do any harm. I think I deserve a break too. I'm not very busy just now. Let's plan some expeditions. I might even get old Wills to hold the fort for me over a long week-end and ride over into Shropshire and have a look at Lesswardine. We promised ourselves to do that a long time ago."

Matthew received the suggestion without much enthusiasm.

"As a matter of fact I had something else in mind. Old George Perks has invited me to stay with him in Alvaston for a couple of weeks. Since he chucked up Medicine I hardly ever see him."

"I'd much rather you spent your holiday in reasonably fresh air instead of stewing in Alvaston."

"Well, I can't very well get out of it now, Dad. I promised George, anyway; and I'm sure he'd be disappointed if I let him down. It's odd: you've always disliked him, haven't you?"

"I know nothing whatever about him; I just don't like the sound of him."

"That's not very sporting. God knows, you don't give me the chance of making many friends."

"If you've accepted the Perks's invitation, you'll have to go, I suppose."

"They're expecting me for dinner to-morrow night." He hesitated: "By the way, if any letters come for me, will you please forward them? I'll leave the address."

"Letters? What sort of letters?"

The word had awakened a vague disquietude in John Bradley's mind. During the last few months he had noticed an unusual anxiety on Matthew's part to hang about the house until the postman had made his single early delivery. Once or twice, when the post came in late, he had stayed so long as to miss his train.

It was a trifling thing for a busy man to notice and probably unimportant. Yet, somehow, the matter had stuck in the back of his memory, and the fact that Matthew now evaded his question made him repeat it.

"What sort of letters, Matthew?"

He smiled; the tone of his voice was good-humoured and casual. The last thing in the world he expected was Matthew's violent reaction. His face flushed, then went white. He spoke with a bitter intensity:

"You've no right to ask such a question, though, of course, it's just like you. If you had your way, Dad, you'd never let me have a life of my own. Every damned thing I do . . . You come clucking after me like any old hen. All the time you treat me as if I were still at school. Can't I even have private letters without your poking your nose into them?"

"There's no need to fly off the handle like that, my dear boy," John said mildly.

"I think it's about time I did. For a chap of my age to have to account for everything he does and every moment he spends . . . I think it's abominable."

"I'm naturally interested in everything you do, Matthew. If it comes to that, *I* haven't many friends either."

"It's all of a piece, and I'm sick to death of it. However, as far as forwarding letters goes, you may just

as well open them. I suppose you'll have to know sooner or later anyway. I'm in a devil of a mess!"

"What sort of a mess, Matthew?"

"Oh, the usual sort of mess. Money."

John Bradley thanked heaven for that. It might easily have been trouble with some girl.

"You mean you're in debt and somebody's dunning you? Is that why you've been waiting so anxiously for the postman every morning? You might have saved yourself that if you'd told me before. You promised me that you would, you know."

"Well, now I've kept my promise. I'd have done so before, but I couldn't quite bring myself to it. It's been on my mind for months."

"How much do you owe?"

"I think it's about fifty pounds. They're mostly tailors' and outfitters' bills. I'd always been told that tailors never worried their customers and gave credit for years."

John laughed. "That rather depends on the customers. You're a minor, you see, and I'm the person they'd worry."

"Yes, George Perks said they'd come down on you—that was what I hated—and one of them threatened to write to you. I promised to pay him something on account when my next quarter's allowance came in, and he said in that case he wouldn't; but there are two others after me now, and I know I shan't be able to keep them quiet much longer."

"Well, let's make a list and find out what you owe. I expect you know all the amounts."

"I should jolly well think I did!"

They made out a list together. It was longer and heavier, when it came to the point, than Matthew had suggested. The final figure was more like eighty pounds than fifty. Small sums, as Matthew gloomily admitted, had a way of "mounting up."

"Are you sure that's all?" John asked.

"I'm sure it's all that matters."

"Everything matters, Matthew. We must get things straight while we're about it. There's an odd thing I've learnt in my practice: in making a confession people find it difficult to be completely honest with themselves; they nearly always keep some little thing back. It's nothing to be ashamed of: it's apparently just human nature."

"Well . . . I borrowed a fiver from George. But I can pay that back next month."

"You promised to pay the tailor next month, you told me. You can't do both."

"No: I suppose I can't."

"Quite certain there's nothing more?"

"I pawned my watch and my microscope. Lots of fellows do that when they're in a hole. They gave me six pounds for the two."

"That wasn't very generous. The microscope's worth at least twenty pounds second-hand. Anything else?"

"No, I'm sure that's the lot. This makes me feel pretty small, Dad."

"If you'd kept your promise and told me as soon as the trouble began you wouldn't have had to feel small."

"I know that. Don't rub it in, Dad."

"Let's see what it comes to. Eleven pounds more. That makes eighty-seven in all. That means nearly thirty pounds a year beyond your allowance. Give me all the bills and I'll send a cheque for each of them."

"I'd much rather pay them myself."

"The other way seems to me better."

"So you don't trust me even now," Matthew said despondently.

He looked so hurt that John Bradley was forced to give way to him.

"Very well," he said, "I'll make out a cheque for the lot in your name and you shall bring me back the receipts—not forgetting the watch and the microscope."

"I can't very well ask George Perks for a receipt for that fiver."

"Of course not. As long as I know you've paid him, that won't matter."

That evening John Bradley made out a cheque for eighty-seven pounds fourteen shillings and sixpence. This absorbed rather more than the dividend he had just received from his Sedgebury Main Ordinaries, which he had planned to set aside for the tuition fees

and expenses of Matthew's next year. From the first it had seemed as if Fate were against his hopes of increasing his capital: during the last three years he had not been able to put by a penny. As for this last unexpected drain on his slender bank-balance, he supposed he must regard it as a reasonable price to pay for the renewal of their mutual confidence which, so long as Matthew's mind was haunted by secret debts, could never have been complete. Perhaps this was cheap at the price. It was only by making mistakes that Youth learned wisdom, though he wished for himself that the lesson had been less expensive.

"Anyway, I shall never let you down in this way again," Matthew said.

No doubt he meant what he said. That, at least, was encouraging. Yet, oddly enough, looking back on this time—and particularly on the fortnight during which Matthew left him, to visit his questionable friend in Alveston—Dr. Bradley was able to recall the distress of a strange new mood tinged with doubt, apprehensiveness and vague fears to which he could not give a name: a state of mind which, up to this point, had been foreign to his nature. It was partly due, no doubt, to his preoccupation with money matters: to his knowing that—thanks to Furnival's vendetta and the unscrupulous competition of Boyle and Macrae—his practice was losing ground, combined with a haunting consciousness of the fact that he was already a year behind in the time-schedule he had so confidently laid

down for the completion of Matthew's training. It was due even more (though this he did not realize) to changes within himself.

John Bradley was now in his forty-sixth year; and for more than two-thirds of his life he had been struggling, often unconsciously, to make up for his original disadvantages. He had succeeded in doing this; but the continuous struggle had told on him, and whenever the strain was relaxed (as in this slack fortnight of Matthew's Alvaston holiday) his mind became full of foreboding. Though to casual observers he would have seemed to be still "in the prime of life," he had reached, in fact, a little earlier than most men, that period, critical for the spirit, in which human beings suddenly realize that their youth is over, that they have lived, by all reasonable calculations, more than half their lives; that their feet are now set on a downward slope which must decline, abruptly or gradually.

Looking back on that sombre state of mind now, out of the detachment of old age, Dr. Bradley found no difficulty in recognizing his uncertainties as a natural physical phenomenon, the equivalent, in the cycle of life, of a turning engine's dead centre. He knew now—and would have been happier had he known it then—that in every normal human existence there are two periods of complete self-confidence: youth, so rich in vitality and abounding hope that no ill can wholly daunt its belief in the future; and old age, so steeled

by life's experience, so conscious of its inevitable end, that it can accept good or ill with equal serenity. At the moment which Dr. Bradley was now remembering, he had outlived the first of these, but was not within sight of the second; he had stood bewildered and lonely midway between the two, in that spiritual climacteric which makes the heaviest demands on human faith and courage.

And indeed, before long, he was to have need of both these qualities.

(III)

Matthew's return from Alvaston, in breezy spirits and apparently uncorrupted by evil communications, blew these clouds away. They settled down to read together for the Primary Fellowship. It was, as John Bradley knew before they started, a chancy venture—for though the subjects, Anatomy and Physiology, were identical with those in which Matthew had lately satisfied his North Bromwich examiners, the standard set by the Royal College of Surgeons was higher and the examination itself designed to discourage rather than to invite success. There was in it, admittedly, a large element of luck, and those candidates who had worked in London and were acquainted with the examiners' personal foibles and recent laboratory researches had an advantage over provincials forced to rely on mere book-learning. Many surgeons who, later

on in their careers, had risen to eminence, had been ploughed, as John knew, in their first attempt at the Primary Fellowship through ignorance of an examiner's latest whim in Physiological theory. No discredit attached to such failures: but, unfortunately, in Matthew's case, the question of credit or discredit did not arise. If he failed in this first attempt John Bradley knew he would have to resign the hope of his ever becoming a surgeon. One year had already been lost: as his finances stood now they would not bear the strain of his losing another. It was "now or never."

At present there seemed no need for him to fear. If the Physiological part of the exam. was something of a gamble, being concerned with an expanding science in which research made yesterday's heresy the pet theory of to-day and to-morrow's accepted doctrine, the second subject, Anatomy, in which John was qualified to help him, demanded nothing more than an unusually accurate knowledge of details which had been recognized and had not changed since the Inquisition had sent Andrea Vesalius packing from Padua. Provided a candidate worked sufficiently hard, had a good memory, and kept his head, there was no reason why he should fail.

And Matthew, whose memory John Bradley found excellent in comparison with his own, worked hard enough in all conscience. The incident of the debts (which, serious as they had seemed at the time, his father had quickly forgotten) had hurt his pride and

made him anxious to make good. Not even Dr. Smiles himself could have asked for a more industrious student. All through the autumn and winter they worked together. The task of keeping his wits sufficiently sharp at the end of his own day's work to be of any real help was not easy for John Bradley who, after all, was running a largish practice single-handed. The monotony of pursuing the same subjects for a second year told on Matthew too; his brain was not built to stay so long a course. Though he had ceased to complain of the time he wasted each day going into and out of North Bromwich, he was always "picking up" colds in the train, and constant reading, by tiring his eyes, increased the frequency and severity of his attacks of migraine.

"If ever I have any time for original work when I'm qualified," he said, "I shall do my best to get to the bottom of this damned disease. Just because the poor patient has nothing to show for it and it never kills anybody, physicians calmly accept it as a matter of course and won't take the trouble to do any research on it. If I kept count of the days of ghastly pain that I lose through it I bet they'd mount up to nearly a month every year."

John gave him tonics, believing that the greater frequency of the attacks was mainly due to fatigue from overstraining a delicate nervous system. Matthew did not respond to them. They only made him more jerky, he said, and spoilt his sleep. By the

end of the following spring he was beginning to look so washed-out that John Bradley wondered whether he ought to allow him to drive himself any farther; but Matthew irritably rejected the idea of taking a holiday.

"That would put me out of my stride," he said, "and ruin everything."

"There's such a thing as getting stale," John warned him.

"I'll take as long a holiday as you like," he said, "when once I'm through. Only two more months to go: that's one consolation."

At the beginning of June Matthew came home one day blanched and shattered by one of the usual "heads." He staggered upstairs, his eyes narrowed against the light, and threw himself on his bed with a wet towel pulled tight round his temples. John gave him a hot-water bottle, pulled down the blinds, and left him to sleep it off. In the night he heard him vomiting, and was thankful—for this usually marked the culmination of an attack; but next morning, when he took him an early cup of tea, Matthew could not swallow it: the paroxysms of sickness continued.

"This is the worst go I've ever had," he said, faintly. "It started at four yesterday afternoon. Why hasn't it stopped? They never last more than twelve hours, but this has been going on now for sixteen and the agony's quite unbearable. For God's sake give me something to ease it, Dad."

He was suffering so desperately that John gave him a hypodermic injection of morphine. Within ten minutes his brow relaxed.

"You've done the trick this time," he whispered drowsily. "This is absolute heaven. What was it you gave me, Dad?"

"Never mind what it was. Go to sleep and forget about it."

"It was morphine, wasn't it?"

"Just a sixth of a grain."

"What time is it?"

"Half-past ten. I'm going out on my round."

"I can't go into town to-day."

"Don't even think of it. Go to sleep and forget about it."

When John Bradley came home at midday the bouts of sickness had returned. This must be more, he decided, than an ordinary attack of migraine. He took Matthew's temperature. It was slightly under a hundred; but the pulse was too rapid for his liking. He examined the abdomen and found no rigidity—the morphine had made the muscles relax. There was, however, a palpable resistance to his fingers on the right side, but no tenderness on pressure: the morphine might easily have masked that too.

"If it weren't for this wretched sickness," Matthew said feebly, "I should feel all right. My head's perfectly clear. Funny, isn't it?"

It was rather more than funny. If he had found

this condition in any ordinary case John Bradley would have suspected appendicitis. He wished he hadn't given the morphine injection, for the presence of pain or tenderness would have made diagnosis easier. After all, he told himself, he was probably unnecessarily anxious and the trouble no more than an exceptionally severe attack of migraine. He was shocked at his own lack of resolution, realizing the incompetence of a medical man to handle with scientific detachment the case of a person he loved; at his desire to temporize, his instinctive reluctance to believe the worst. But when the evening came, Matthew's temperature remained unchanged and his pulse-rate was rather higher.

John remembered how, years ago, he had laughed at Clara's fears of appendicitis. He examined Matthew's abdomen again, but could not make up his mind. If the suspected condition existed outside his imagination, this was a case for a surgical specialist; but it would be hardly fair to drag Lacey out from North Bromwich, and unpleasant to be laughed at for his pains. The immediate alternative was Boyle, who was certainly a more competent surgeon than himself; but the idea of paying his enemy the compliment of consulting him and revealing his own panic did not appeal to him. He decided to compromise, and telephoned to Wills.

It was odd, considering how little respect he had for Wills's medical opinion, how great a relief his

arrival gave him and how anxiously he hung on his verdict. Wills, as might have been expected, was suavely non-committal, begging the question by calling Matthew's illness a "bilious attack"—which, accurate though the description of the symptoms might be, contributed nothing whatever to the diagnosis.

"He probably has a slight liver chill on the top of his sick-headache," he said, "which accounts for the temperature. In the absence of pain and tenderness I shouldn't worry, Bradley; but I'll look in to-morrow in any case, just to see how he's getting on. You mustn't forget he's a nervous chap anyway."

John Bradley clutched, with pathetic eagerness, at this reassurance. Matthew himself declared that, apart from feeling drowsy, he was "all right"; but next morning his temperature was still "up", his pulse even more rapid, and he still felt sick. Doubting Wills no less than himself, John sent for Lacey, who, as bad luck would have it, was out in the country operating and could not arrive before evening.

When he came at last, he paid little heed to John Bradley's apologies for troubling him. The contrast between his swift directness and Wills's suave hesitations made John wish to heaven he had sent for him earlier.

"I've no doubt whatever about this," he said. "There's an inflamed appendix. Why didn't you send for me yesterday?"

"He complained of no pain or tenderness."

"That's easily explained. You say you've given him morphine; that's masked the symptoms. Don't ever do that again, John, in a case where there's any suspicion of abdominal trouble. It's not fair to the surgeon."

"Of course, when I gave him that dose I had no suspicions. What are you going to do?"

"I must operate . . . and at once."

"Shall I telephone for an ambulance?"

"I daren't move him. We've lost thirty-six hours already. What about an anæsthetist? Do you feel like giving it yourself?" He saw John's face fall and smiled. "My poor old fellow! I shouldn't have suggested that. For the moment I'd completely forgotten the other case. I can see you're jumpy: you'll be much better out of it anyway. What about old Wills? Can you trust him?"

"Boyle would actually be better. But Boyle's no friend of mine."

"That's beside the point. Better send for him at once and get a nurse from the cottage hospital to prepare the room. In a case of this kind every minute may count."

It was nine o'clock before Lacey made his incision. John Bradley could never forget the protracted agony he endured as he prowled to and fro with the restlessness of a sad-eyed wolf in a cage, from the sitting-room to the surgery and back again, in an eternity which the hands of his watch could not measure—for, more than once, when he looked at them, he thought they must

have stopped. As he walked with that weary automatism, he sometimes halted to listen to the rumour of undistinguishable voices, the shuffle of feet, which filtered downstairs, on an air that smelt sharply of ether and antiseptics, from his own bedroom (the room where Matthew had been born and Clara had died) which had been hurriedly cleared and cleaned and turned into a theatre. At half-past ten precisely—if his watch had not stopped—he heard Lacey descending. There was nothing in his fine, pale face to give John an inkling of what he thought or was feeling: it had the grave composure of a workman who has completed one job and passes on to the next.

"Well, what did you find?" John Bradley asked eagerly.

"Precisely what I expected. I'm glad we lost no time, John. These things develop terribly rapidly. The appendix was gangrenous already and an abscess had formed. I'm thankful you didn't leave it until to-morrow, or we might have been in the soup with a general peritonitis."

"But you weren't too late?"

"I hope not. I've drained it as well as I can, and he stood the anæsthetic quite well. By the way, your friend Boyle is a damned good anæsthetist and seems pretty sound generally. If I were you I should leave the boy in his hands."

"I'll do whatever you tell me."

"Well, that's my advice. Anxious fathers are apt to

be nervy, and everything depends, as you realize, on what happens in the next few days. I suggested that course to Boyle, but he seemed a bit diffident. From his manner I gather you are not on the best of terms; so I think he'd rather you asked him yourself. You ought really to have a couple of nurses as well."

"Very well. I'll speak to Boyle. If you'll arrange about the nurses I shall be grateful."

It was something of a blow to John Bradley's pride to leave Boyle in possession. No doubt Wills would be huffed and have to be placated, while Boyle would certainly get all the advertisement he could of the compliment Lacey had paid him. However, this was no time for considerations of that kind. The only thing of importance was Matthew's safety. John Bradley was no longer in the position of a doctor, but in that of a patient whose duty it was to accept advice and do as he was told.

All the rest of the night he kept watch by Matthew's bed. When he came round, after midnight, he was inclined to be talkative. There was no pain in the wound to speak of, he said, and though he felt sodden with ether and rather giddy, his head was clear. John forbade him to talk. He sighed and was silent, submissively. In the small hours he spoke:

"Are you there, Dad?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"This has pretty well ditched my Primary Fellowship, hasn't it?"

"We'll think about that when you're better. There's no need to worry now."

"By that time the exam. will be over."

"You can still have another shot," John Bradley said.

"Somehow, d'you know? I don't think I ever shall. It'd mean . . . well, beginning all over again, and I just couldn't face it. Crocking up like this rather shows, doesn't it? that I'd bitten off a bit more than I could chew."

"Well . . . we'll see."

There followed a long silence: then Matthew spoke again, meditatively.

"After all, there'd be no earthly need of my having a fellowship if I decided to give surgery a miss and settled down to general practice in partnership with you."

John Bradley pressed his hand tenderly. They must, at that moment, he felt, have been very near together, for Matthew had merely put his own thoughts into words.

(IV)

For a week, during which he showed signs of increasing exhaustion, Matthew's fever persisted, and it was touch and go. Lacey had never shown the fidelity of his friendship for John Bradley more

clearly than by finding time, amid the pressure of activities that kept him on the run for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, to dash over to Sedgebury every day until the danger was over. Boyle, too, played his part in the struggle. In spite of the Barnett case—a failure that, after all, might happen to anybody—he had never doubted his rival's professional capacity. Boyle was still stiff and formal, and both men were on their guard; their relationship was rather that of an armistice than of a treaty of peace; there was no man on earth to whom John would less gladly have been beholden, but the personal obligation had been established perforce, and there was now no evading it—John knew that when next their interests clashed he would feel his teeth had been drawn, and Boyle, who was not without a grim humour, triumphantly realized that aspect of the situation.

Even when the period of danger was over, the wound healed slowly. The main source of Matthew's resistance had lain in his nervous energy rather than in his constitution. It was only by a hair's breadth that he had escaped with his life; he had no reserves of strength, and a long convalescence which wearied them both kept him in bed for nearly three months—until within a few weeks of the opening of the autumn session. As soon as he was fit to be moved, John Bradley arranged for him to be driven down to the Collins's farm at Monk's Norton, in Worcestershire, where he had spent the Easter holiday preceding

Clara's death. When, after a stay of three weeks, he returned to Sedgebury, he was certainly better in general health, but by no means recovered; John, meeting him at Stourton Junction with a hired car, was shocked by the change in his appearance, not so much because he looked ill as because he looked oddly old: the suppleness of boyhood had gone out of him; he was, in fact, no longer the boy he knew, but a strange, moustached young man with bowed shoulders and a haggard, heavily-lined face, out of which his smouldering eyes, beneath their black brows, appeared to regard the world with a languid resentment.

Since the night of the operation the subject of Matthew's future had not been discussed. That evening it was he who re-opened it.

"I've been thinking things over down at Monk's Norton," he said, "and I've come to the conclusion that it would be only a waste of time for me to go on with the Fellowship. My brain's in a muddle; I seem to have forgotten everything I ever knew; and the idea of beginning all over again simply makes me sick. Besides which, I know quite well you can't afford it."

"If your heart were still set on it, Matthew, I'd manage to scrape the money together somehow or other."

"But my heart isn't set on it now, Dad. I don't seem to be getting anywhere. I've been at it four years, and some of the chaps I started with will be qualified in twelve months' time. They'll begin to look

upon me as a 'chronic', and that's no fun, is it? for a fellow who's always rather fancied himself."

"It's no good your starting any work until you're fit. We'll go in and see Lacey to-morrow."

He was fit enough to start work again, Lacey said, though of course it would take some months to get over the effects of such a heavy absorption of poison. The vague pains of which he complained were probably due to adhesions, and might be expected after such widespread inflammation. On the whole, after a long break of this kind, it was usually a sound thing to get into harness and loosen up gradually. If he felt he couldn't face the strain of preparing for the Primary Fellowship, he had much better put it out of his mind for the time being, go through with his exams. for a pass degree, and have another shot at it after he was qualified.

"I wish you had cured my headaches, sir," Matthew said. "They've been worse since the operation than ever before. I feel as if I'd got one coming now. It's probably the journey that's brought it on. Even when I was a kid, a train journey always upset me."

"You've been travelling into North Bromwich and home again every day, haven't you? How long does it take?"

"A couple of hours. That's just to the University. If I start 'dressing' at Prince's, as I suppose I shall have to do now, it will take me another hour—that makes three in all. I've said again and again that it

was a terrible waste of time and energy, but Dad wouldn't agree with me."

Lacey looked at John quizzically. He felt he had to explain himself.

"Well, you see, first of all," he said, "there's the question of expense: and, apart from that I've always felt—rather selfishly, perhaps—that living at home was good for the boy."

Matthew laughed. "I'm not exactly a boy, Dad. After all I'm nearly of age."

"Besides, I've been able to help him with his work."

"Yes, yes, that's quite true," Lacey said, "and it's also perfectly natural for you to want to keep him at home; but, as Matthew says, this continual travelling to and fro, three hours of it every day, is a considerable strain, and I'm not sure he's up to it. Why don't you try to find some decent diggings—the Dean keeps a list—and let him come home at week-ends? Unless, of course, you have any relations in North Bromwich. I seem to remember your wife was connected with old Jacob Medhurst, of Boulton Crescent, who died last year. Wasn't there another daughter or niece who kept house for him?"

"Yes, Janet, my wife's elder sister. The practice was sold, of course, and she's living in Alvaston. I've not seen her for years."

"Well, isn't that rather an idea?" Lacey said. "If she's unmarried and living alone, she may be quite glad of her nephew's company; and if Jacob Medhurst

left her his money, she must be pretty well off, so he ought to be comfortable."

"Yes . . . it is an idea," John admitted. "The only thing is . . ."

"Ah, I see you don't want to lose him."

"I don't. But if you say he ought to live in North Bromwich that's what he shall do. We'll find out exactly where Janet lives and go and see her."

"I'm sure that's the best solution," Lacey said. "We'll telephone Jacob Medhurst's successor. He's bound to know her address. I must leave you now, I'm afraid, John: a call to Wolverbury. But my secretary will get Miss Medhurst's address for you in a moment or two, and when Matthew turns up at Prince's you can trust me to keep an eye on him."

Janet Medhurst's address was Eighteen, Meadows Lane, Alvaston, Lacey's secretary said. Matthew could not go with John Bradley to find it; his headache, the usual result of any unusual nervous excitement, had set its relentless grip on him; the only thing he could do was to struggle home to a dark room at Sedgebury. John saw him depart and found his way to Meadows Lane, a quiet cul-de-sac leading out of one of the more fashionable roads of Alvaston, and typical of that gracious suburb in its power of suggesting a green and rustic quietude within a few hundred yards of the noise and smoke of central North Bromwich. It could not be more than a quarter of a

mile, he noted with satisfaction, from the Prince's Hospital.

Number Eighteen proved to be the last house of all on the left of this short blind alley. The corresponding plot on the opposite side of the road had escaped being built on. It opened on to a field with a haystack in the corner and, at the farther end, a line of pollarded elms already tinged with gold; so that the house itself—with its shrubbery of Portugal laurel and lilac and laburnum in front and a smooth lawn with an old pear-tree in the midst behind it—seemed actually more “in the country” than was the surgery at the corner of Crabb's Lane, now that the Sedgebury Main Colliery Company and the Jubilee Works had blighted the landscape.

It was a small stucco house, yet not without dignity: the product of the earliest Victorian taste, with a pillared porch and a lightly-moulded cornice. The well-swept steps, the glossy green-painted door, the brightly-polished brass of door-handle and bell-pull, gave it the air of a house inhabited by an owner who took pride in elegant detail and was able to pay for it. The middle-aged maid who opened the door to him, in black uniform with a long-streamered cap, bore no resemblance to the friendly slut who had “run” Jacob Medhurst's establishment at Boulton Crescent; she was obviously “superior” and used to the traditions of “good service”. She held out a silver tray to receive a visiting-card. John told her he hadn't got one and

mumbled his name. Without any doubt Janet knew her mind (as she had always done) and had got what she wanted. She must, of course, be a rich woman now. That, in itself, though he hated feeling consciously mercenary, was an excellent reason for letting Matthew live with her. In a house of this kind he would have more comfort than he could ever find in the most expensive diggings.

The maid showed him into a room with folding doors set midway, which ran the depth of the house. At the farther end, French windows opened on to the lawn and the solitary pear-tree, whose leaves, touched by autumn, shone like ruddy fruit. There were low ranges of bookshelves attached to the walls on either side; the gilt of gay bindings reflected the light of a wood-fire burning cheerfully in a duck-nest Carron grate. The whole room was so alien to everything he remembered of Janet's former surroundings, that he half suspected he had come to the wrong house until, of a sudden, amid the unfamiliar furniture, he found an old friend in the gilt Empire chair in which Jacob Medhurst had been wont to take his after-dinner sleep.

Yet Janet's surroundings were hardly more changed than Janet herself. When she entered, he could not believe that the slim, spectacled, white-haired woman who held out her hand to him was actually she. Apparently she found the sight of him almost as great a surprise.

"Why, John," she said quietly. "Can it really be

you? I thought you had quite forgotten me. This is a tremendous surprise."

"I gave your maid my name."

"Yes, she didn't catch it, and merely said there was a 'gentleman' to see me. She was a little flustered. I don't see many gentlemen. Sit down, and let me look at you." She surveyed him with the ghost of the old faint mockery on her lips. They were thin lips now, and her face had lost its dark bloom, but the mockery was still there. "You haven't changed much," she said.

"Well, you . . ." he began.

"Oh, I . . . I'm a prim and shrivelled old spinster. Don't look at me, please, John. Not that looks really matter much—to me at any rate. I'm quite content. I have everything that I ask of life—rather later, I must admit, than I should have liked. But there it is: no more book-keeping, no more irregular meals, no more night-bells; time to think and to read. Well, well, life's a queer business, isn't it?"

She put a taper in the fire and lit a cigarette. It gave him a shock to see that. Clara had always "set her face" against women smoking. Janet must have read his thoughts:

"I smoke like a chimney," she said. "It's one of the vices of my old age. Won't you have one of these? No? In that case I'll ring for tea. Tea drinking's the other one. Now tell me what this delightful visit means?"

"Delightful!"

"I mean it, Johnny. I *am* delighted to see you."

He told her the story of Matthew's illness from beginning to end and the results of their consultation that afternoon with Martin Lacey.

"You still worship that young hero, John," she said. "You're very faithful. I suppose he's become a tremendously big gun now, and you like to feel you were clever at spotting a winner."

"He's not young any longer, Janet, but he's still my friend and I'd sooner take his advice than anyone else's."

"And he wants me to house my nephew? Does he think if he went into lodgings he'd get into mischief? Well . . . he's the only nephew I've got; but I don't see that I have any qualifications for looking after young men. I know nothing whatever about them, particularly the modern ones. I've had few opportunities. I never liked men very much, as a matter of fact—except perhaps you, John. But that was a long time ago. Is the boy at all like you?"

"More like me than like Clara."

"That's one good thing, anyway. Poor Clara and I had very little in common, you know."

"I always thought you the most devoted sisters."

"How odd—and what good manners we must have had! Thank heaven, when a woman gets to my age, she doesn't have to be tactful any longer. And if she has enough money, she can afford to be candid. The trouble with all these luxuries is that they come too

late. I suppose you know Uncle Jacob left me extremely well off?"

"I expected he would."

"I suppose, after all these years, John, you're pretty prosperous too?"

He laughed. "I can pay my debts. By the way," he went on—for they seemed to be drifting away from the important subject, "if you give Matthew a home I shall want to pay you something."

"That would be quite ridiculous. On those terms I wouldn't take him. I doubt if I'm really cut out for an efficient landlady. Still, as you say, it might be nice for both of us to have one another's company. I might see rather more of you: that, also, would be nice. Send him in to see me to-morrow and I'll look him over. If I don't like his looks or his ways I shall say so—though I expect he'll be just like you were—the model industrious apprentice. My word, what an earnest good young man you were, John!"

"I was merely rustic and shy. Matthew isn't either, thank heaven."

"Well . . . we shall see."

When he reached Sedgebury two hours later, in time for the evening surgery, prepared to see Matthew crushed and prostrated on his bed as a result of his attack of migraine, he found him, instead, downstairs, not only recovered, but unusually bright and talkative and in roaring high spirits.

"I lay down for an hour as soon as I got home," he said, "and the pain passed off almost immediately—there's not a twinge of it left!"

John Bradley was happy to find him so cheerful. It was the first time since the operation that he had seemed anything like his old self. He attributed Matthew's flushed cheeks and exalted mood to his excitement at the thought of being free at last to live in North Bromwich. It was rather cruel of him, John thought, to make his delight in the prospect of their separation quite so obvious; he might at least have said that, for some reasons, he was sorry to leave him. Yet, sore though he felt at this seeming callousness—which, perhaps, was no more than might be expected from the egotism of Youth—he had to confess that what he desired most in life was Matthew's health and happiness and success, and that, compared with these, his own loneliness was a matter of small importance.

The sooner the break was made, if it were to be made, the better for everybody. On the following day Matthew went to Alvaston, as they had arranged, to be inspected by his Aunt Janet. John had no doubt as to what the result of the interview would be: when he chose to (as he did when he wanted to get his way with anyone) Matthew had no difficulty in presenting himself as a modest and charming young man. The idea of escaping from Sedgebury seemed to have given him a new impetus, new hope, new

enthusiasm. He was delighted with Janet's comfortable house and the prospect of a style of living which was more to his taste than the primitive conditions of their bachelor establishment in Sedgebury. He had taken to Janet, too, though he couldn't "quite make her out".

"It's funny," he said: "to look at her you'd think she was nothing more than a quiet, stuffy old maid. But she isn't, you know. There's something about her mouth and her eyes—just the shadow of a smile—that makes you not quite sure that she isn't laughing at you when she seems most serious. She's a sense of humour, too, and a quick way of picking you up when you least expect it. I should think she must be very well read, though she says she isn't musical like mother was; and, by Jove, she must have been frightfully pretty when she was a girl."

"You two hit it off rather well, then?"

"Oh Lord, yes. We got on like a house on fire. I expect—although nothing on earth would make her confess it—she's really rather lonely, and perhaps a bit disappointed at never having married. She'll have the room ready for me to come in next Monday. It's a splendid arrangement really, Dad: I wonder you never thought of it before. And it'll be rather fun coming home for a change at week-ends," he added magnanimously.

CHAPTER TWELVE

(I)

WOULD it have made much difference to what happened later, Dr. Bradley asked himself, if he had rejected Lacey's advice and obeyed the cautionary instinct which, up till that point, had made him fight against the idea of Matthew's being separated from him and going to live in North Bromwich? At the time he had inwardly questioned the wisdom of the step, and later, heaven knew, most bitterly regretted it. Yet, looking back on it now and examining the complex of motives and events in the perspective they had gained by the passage of nearly thirty years, neither judgment nor conscience reproached him.

In all the major decisions of his life—many of which, at the time when he made them, had not seemed of vital significance—he had been guided, it seemed to him now, by the various pressures of circumstance rather than by instinct—or even by reason. He had always acted, as he believed, for the best, and, given similar circumstances, could hardly have acted otherwise. The free will, as he saw it now, had only a relative freedom, the direction in which it was applied being determined by a nice balance of forces—self-

interest, conscience, love, fear, doubt, possessiveness, sentimentality, obstinacy, sheer human contrariness—which, moved themselves by other hidden imponderables, combined to produce a resultant that, though it soothed the mind with a plausible sense of its own indisputable mastery, was, in unsuspected fact, the way of least resistance.

Thus, while once, in youth, he had imagined a large part of his life to have been designed by himself with a leavening of chance, good or bad, and later, in middle age, had been tempted to ascribe its unsatisfactory shape to the work of some controlling Power with an ironic sense of drama, he was now persuaded that the things which had happened to him, pleasant or unpleasant, had been the result of a number of linked causes in which his own will had done no more than play a connecting part. However disputable these conclusions might be, they were at least in keeping with the cast of an old man's mind, which, looking back over his own experience and his patients' histories, perceived that life as a whole was much of a muchness, that its good and evil were generally pretty well balanced, that no man, by taking thought, could greatly alter the shape of it, and that, since the end was the same in any case, human beings would be better advised to take it as it came. This passive attitude, in part the natural result (as he was ready to admit) of his declining energies, excused him equally from taking pride in his attainments, such as they were, and from re-

proaching himself for his errors. What remained of life was too little for him to see any profit in doing either.

Even so, as now he recalled the events of that period, which covered the next three years of Matthew's life, he could not help recognizing the fact that had he been more alive or more observant, he might possibly have modified if not altered the course they took. For a man of his age and for a doctor he had been oddly unsuspecting and innocent. If he had seen in a patient he was treating the things he saw in Matthew, he would have found himself interpreting them as a matter of habit. But the eyes with which he saw Matthew (and, to do him justice, he only saw him occasionally and less and less as time went on) were not a doctor's eyes: they were blinded by an affection so powerful and so emotionally confused by the joy of seeing him as to inhibit the exercise of functions practice had taught them.

During the first six months, when Matthew came out to Sedgebury fairly regularly for week-ends and, more rarely, John Bradley spent a few stolen hours with him and Janet in Alvaston, he had no reason to suspect that anything much was amiss. It was true that, though he seemed to be happy, Matthew did not seem to be "picking up" physically so quickly as he had hoped; he was far more languid than John Bradley felt he should have been after an operation which had removed a focus that had been poisoning him for

years; his complexion was sallow and liverish; it had lost the sanguine colouring of which, a few years ago, any girl might well have been proud. John suspected the excellence of Janet's kitchen as a probable cause.

"You don't look as if you were getting enough exercise," he said.

"Oh, I get quite enough of that," Matthew said, "walking down from the Prince's to the University and home again."

"And he doesn't eat much," Janet Medhurst declared. "There are days when he hardly has any appetite. Not like yours used to be, John. I remember quite well, when you first came to Boulton Crescent, Clara almost despaired of feeding you."

"How are the 'heads' going nowadays?"

"Oh, I hardly ever get them."

"That isn't quite true, John," Janet put in. "As a matter of fact, he gets them every few days. I can tell that quite easily by the blinky look in his eyes and the fact that he makes a bolt for his bedroom and pulls down the blind. But he's generally up again in less than an hour, and exceptionally pleased with himself, too."

"Well, I've learnt how to deal with the beastly things now," Matthew said, rather surlily.

"You oughtn't to take antipyrin too frequently, you know," John warned him. "It's a cardiac depressant."

"Oh, I've given that up long ago, Dad."

"Then what do you take?"

"Phenacetin and Caffein Citrate. That's Sir Arthur Weldon's prescription."

"Caffein's coffee, isn't it?" Janet asked. "That must be what wakes him up and makes him so talkative."

"I should go easy with that as well. I don't like these coal-tar products taken indiscriminately."

"Anything's better than that awful pain. I know what I'm doing, Dad."

"Well . . . thank heaven you've found a new way of scotching it."

That was a conversation which he remembered afterwards, though, at the time, he attached no importance to it. Even if Matthew didn't look so well as he should, he certainly appeared to be enjoying himself in his new surroundings. Janet Medhurst and he had become great friends. Since Clara had left Bouxton Crescent, more than twenty years ago, Janet's only companions had been books. She had lived within the limits of a minute, cloistered world of her own, wherein creature comforts (with which she was now more amply provided) and the vicarious experience she enjoyed in imaginative literature had given her a providential illusion of content. Thanks to the isolation of Jacob Medhurst's house in its surrounding wilderness of slums and to the old man's increasing jealousy she had never been permitted to make any friends. All her culture—and she was not merely an intelligent but a cultivated woman—was a secret and private possession, closely guarded by what had once

been a delicate shyness, but had now become an armour of brazen (and rather forbidding) detachment. All the generous impulses of a nature which had originally been ardent, vivid and tender had been so deliberately repressed and concealed that now, at the age of fifty, she seemed on the surface a hard and, on occasions, an acid old maid.

Yet, beneath this protective exterior, there still persisted in Janet Medhurst's virginal heart a store of tenderness and affection which, but for Matthew's coming to live with her, would probably never have been released. He was the first human being, apart from Clara, with whom she had ever dared to allow herself any intimate relationship. He was attractive to her, though she did not know it, because he was a man, yet so young, compared with herself, that the question of emotional complications did not arise. He was a creature, in part, of her own blood, far nearer to a son of her own than any stranger could have been; so that her attitude towards him—though no doubt there were other elements in it—had a maternal quality that was at once possessive and protective, and so fiercely prejudiced in his favour that she was incapable of seeing any defect in him.

John Bradley found that attitude amusing and a trifle pathetic. He was happy to think that Janet had found at last an absorbing interest that filled satisfactorily a life which had been so barren of human relationships. He was glad of it, too, for Matthew's

sake: though the feminine influence in his childhood had preponderated to an unhealthy degree, he recognized his own unfitness, try as he might, to fill a mother's place. The only danger to Matthew that he foresaw was the probability that Janet, in the flood of released emotion, might spoil him—as she undoubtedly did.

The project of making another attempt at the Primary Fellowship had been abandoned with a grateful relaxation of strain. Matthew had now re-embarked on his curriculum at the point where he had broken it in pursuit of that illusory ambition. He was attending lectures on Medicine and Surgery, "dressing" for one of the surgeons at Prince's (it had been a disappointment to find that he could not assist Lacey, who had already chosen his dressers), and working in the Laboratory at the University on the principal subjects of his Third Examination: Pathology and Bacteriology. The addition of hospital duties to this theoretical work made his days much fuller and more various than they had been when he was merely reading Anatomy and Physiology. John was forced to admit that he could hardly have done justice to both if his working time had been docked by three hours lost daily in the train. Indeed, Janet complained that he was obviously overworked as it was. Nevertheless, from what he casually let slip it appeared that he was out a good deal after dinner at night during the hours when he might have been expected to do his reading.

When John expressed some mild anxiety about this, she rose in Matthew's defence like a tigress.

"You don't seem to realize that he's young, John," she said. "You can't expect a young man to deny himself every kind of amusement. It's unfair to judge Matthew by your middle-aged standards."

"When I was a medical student . . ."

"And you mustn't judge him by yourself. You were a very admirable young man and all that, no doubt, but you were a bit dull when I knew you. If you'd taken life a little less solemnly and occasionally let go and enjoyed yourself, you'd have been much more interesting. I never could really understand what Clara saw in you," she added, with a flash of the old mockery.

"Well, getting qualified was rather a grim business with me."

"That's exactly the impression you gave. Why, you hadn't a single friend except Martin Lacey! Matthew has plenty, thank heaven."

"Who are his friends?"

"The one he talks about most is George Perks."

"I hoped he'd finished with him."

"I don't see why you should. Matthew's brought him here once or twice. The Perks are nice people, and he seems to me an inoffensive young man and quite well-mannered. A bit on the heavy side—but Matthew makes up for that. He's a brewing student and interested in the Theatre."

"I don't like the sound of that either."

"How prejudiced you are, John! Just because you don't happen ever to have been interested in anything but your work, you regard all the Arts with suspicion."

"Theatrical people are pretty poor stuff as a rule. I'd much rather he didn't mix with them."

"You're thinking of Uncle Jacob's pretty ladies?"

"I'm thinking of Matthew's work."

"I don't think you need worry about that. You can't regulate everything in his life. He's not a child."

"A minute ago you were saying that I didn't realize how young he was, my dear Janet. You can't have it both ways."

"How little you know about women, Johnny," was all she said.

The theatrical interests which Matthew shared with George Perks were mainly concerned with the University "Pantomime Night," a sort of licensed Saturnalia, not infrequently degenerating into horse-play, in which the more spirited students of the Faculty of Medicine took a predominant part. In John Bradley's North Bromwich days this festival had not been invented. He was not pleased when he heard that, principally through his friendship with Perks, Matthew had been elected a member of the organizing committee: an office which carried with it the privilege of personal acquaintance with the management of the theatre and the "artists", male and female, who were "starring" in *The Babes in the Wood*. It also entailed,

as John gathered later on, a good deal of indefinite loafing at the back of the stage and in the bars which the comedians frequented.

During that period—the North Bromwich pantomimes dragged on a weary length from Christmas to Easter—Matthew saw nearly as much of the Prince's Theatre as of the Prince's Hospital. One of the Babes, a hungry, hard-faced, husky-voiced musical-comedy *ingénue* of thirty-six named Cora Delabere, had taken a fancy to him and employed him as a convenient foil in her romantic relations with a couple of North Bromwich business men who liked their bit of fun, but knew the value of money. She played Matthew Bradley off against them with considerable skill and allowed him the honour of taking her out to luncheon at the Grand Midland—where she indulged an inexhaustible passion for oysters and lobster mayonnaise—and of decorating her dressing-room with the bouquets of flowers which, according to George Perks, were generally “expected” on such occasions. She flattered Matthew, who played the piano in her lodgings, by discovering that he was a “born musician” and insisted on his composing a number of songs which she was certain she could persuade Mr. Edwardes to use next time she was chosen to play the lead at Daly's or the Gaiety: she had also discovered a boy in the pantomime chorus who was a “born poet” and could supply the words.

John Bradley had no idea of this lady's existence

until, one day, he found himself face to face with three effusively inscribed photographs of her, in trunk hose and tights, on Matthew's mantelpiece. The sight of them gave him a shock and filled him with anxiety, for Miss Delabere was much more dangerously alluring in carbon than in the flesh. He recalled a stray line in a poem by Kipling, which, though he forgot the context, seemed apt to the case—*And your rooms at college was beastly, more like a whore's than a man's*—and went hot at the implication. He was astonished to find that Janet, who knew all about it, did not regard the association seriously. In her eyes it was already established that Matthew could do no wrong; but, even apart from this, she appeared to consider it a good thing for a young man to "have his fling"—almost as though, John thought, she enjoyed a vicarious pleasure in the process.

"Just because you were so inhuman," she said, "and led such a narrow sheltered existence, there's no reason why you should try to turn Matthew into a hermit. I was brought up like that myself—and only look at the result! Joking apart, I believe that young men—and girls, too, for that matter, who are turned out into the world without any experience of life, like you and me, John, are actually at a disadvantage. For heaven's sake let them get their experience while they're still young and before it's too late."

"*And lead us not into temptation,*" John quoted lugubriously.

"Temptation! What nonsense you talk, John! You should read Bernard Shaw. If you think that this woman off-stage is anything like her ravishing photographs, you're very much mistaken. In the first place she's nearly old enough to be Matthew's mother, and in the second I'm perfectly convinced that the affair is what you'd call 'innocent.' Matthew's told me all about it: I expect he finds it easier to give his confidences to me than to you. He imagines he's protecting her. He thinks of her as a timid child-like creature pursued by all the middle-aged married satyrs in North Bromwich. He's told me that she liked him at sight because she knew he would always 'behave as a gentleman.' She appeals to his sense of chivalry. What's wrong with that? Knowing Matthew, and having a shrewd idea what the siren is like, I find it rather touching. If he *is* your son, don't forget he's Uncle Jacob's great-nephew. You can't go on treating him as a baby indefinitely; and, as I've told you already, I really see no harm in his doing amusing things and enjoying himself just because you didn't."

"There may be no harm in it so long as it doesn't interfere with his work."

"If he'd had other interests and not been tied to your apron-strings—or whatever men wear—he probably wouldn't have gone stale and broken down as he did."

"I don't see what apron-strings have to do with appendicitis."

"Oh dear, John, how literal you are."

"I'm not very good at jokes about Matthew's future."

Janet smiled. "You were never awfully good at jokes, anyway, John dear."

Perhaps, after all, Janet was right when she suggested that in some ways, and this way in particular, she understood Matthew better than he did. It was lucky for him in a way that the boy was living with her. Otherwise he knew he would have been worrying his head with anxiety over his every movement. Perhaps she was also right in suggesting that Matthew's life had been prejudiced by the restrictions of an over-anxious paternal supervision and that, long before this, he should have been allowed to find his feet. Even so, he suspected that Janet's affectionate tolerance erred on the side of laxity. Matthew's appearance suggested that he was being encouraged to burn the candle at both ends. No doubt Time would show. . . .

Time showed, without any doubt, in the following summer, when Matthew "came down" in his Third Examination.

(II)

His failure was hard to stomach. Five years already gone—one year more than John Bradley himself, with his modest powers, had spent in completing the

medical curriculum—and at the very least three more to go before Matthew, with luck, could succeed in getting his name on the register! If he went on at this rate, taking two years for every exam., he would be nearly thirty before he was qualified—by which time, if the Sedgebury practice continued to decline at its present rate, there would hardly be enough work left to keep the two of them. John found it difficult to apportion the blame for Matthew's failure. The Delabere incident, after all, had not lasted much more than three months. He was inclined to attribute it, rather, to the influence of undesirable friends—particularly that of George Perks, whom, though he had never seen him, he still regarded as Matthew's evil genius; to Janet's inexplicable laxity and frivolity in matters of conduct, and to his own false step (for which Lacey was partly responsible) in ever letting Matthew out of his sight. Oddly enough, it never occurred to him to blame Matthew.

Nor did it occur to Matthew to blame himself, or even to show much regret for this, his third failure. His conscience did not trouble him. He had worked, on the whole, as hard as could be expected of a fellow who had never really felt fit since his operation. Janet Medhurst corroborated this. Half the time, she said, Matthew seemed to have no energy or power of concentration. Though his headaches were no longer so devastating in their effect they were just as frequent. At least twice a week he would come home complain-

ing and retire to his room, and although he soon got rid of the actual pain, the after-effects continued to plague him and render him useless and dazed for twenty-four hours. Apart from these definite attacks, there was no doubt in her mind that he suffered a good deal of indefinite pain in the neighbourhood of his operation-wound—in his “adhesions”, as he called them. On the whole, considering Matthew’s indifferent health, she thought John judged him rather harshly.

Well, he had to do something about this disquieting state of affairs. His resources were not so great as to be able to stand unexpected strains: but for the interest on his Sedgebury Main Ordinaries he would have been hard put to meet the expenses of the current year—to say nothing of a new crop of debts, rather larger than the first, to which Matthew had laconically confessed just before the examination. If ill-health was really at the bottom of his languor, mental and physical, and his even more sinister indifference towards his career, that aspect of the case must be dealt with.

He determined to tackle it when next Matthew came over to Sedgebury for the week-end.

“I think it’s about time I gave you a thorough overhaul,” he told him. “It’s no good your going on as you are in this unsatisfactory way, neither well nor ailing.”

Matthew’s sallow face flushed. “Why can’t you

leave me alone, Dad? If there were anything definite the matter with me I should let you know soon enough. But there isn't. I'm just run down. All I want is a rest. Nobody seems to make any allowances for the fact that just over a year ago I damned nearly popped off. Of course, I get a good deal of pain on and off from these adhesions. Lacey said I probably would; so that's nothing for anybody but me to worry about."

"You'd better stay here for a week or two and keep quiet."

"All right. I'll do that if you like," he said complaisantly; and John Bradley was so flattered by this condescension and enchanted by the idea of having him with him that he said no more on the subject of an "overhaul" about which Matthew had shown himself so touchy. Even so, now that he had an opportunity of observing him more closely and at greater length, he was by no means satisfied with Matthew's condition. He now looked considerably older than the twenty-two years of his age. Apart from the drab colouring of the dark-moustached face, his eyes were sullen: they seemed to have lost their frankness. Although it was summer, he showed no inclination to go out, preferring to lounge about the house or lie on the sofa with a book. His movements as well as his speech showed a certain languor, alternating, at times, with bursts of excited activity; he was either unusually loquacious and "on the top of himself" or sunk in depths of sullen lethargy. What struck John Bradley

even more forcibly than this unequal disposition, which was only an exaggeration of the moods he had shown as a boy, was the fact that he appeared to have lost all pride in his person. Three years ago he would have been inclined to complain that Matthew spent far too much time and thought and money on his appearance. There was no suggestion of smartness about him now. His clothes were grease-spotted and shapeless, his trousers baggy and unpressed; he would go for three days at a time without shaving, his lank hair often needed a cut and hung in a fringe over a scurfy collar; his hands and nails, when he sat down to breakfast, often proved that he had forgotten to wash. He was beginning to look, in fact, like a young man who had lost all interest in himself and cared nothing what others thought of him.

Towards the end of a fortnight, when he was due to return to North Bromwich, John Bradley, who during the holiday had left it alone, broached the subject of his failure in the Third Examination. Wouldn't it be a good thing, he suggested, to make sure of passing next time by getting some fourth or fifth year man to give him a little coaching?

Matthew brushed the idea aside. He hadn't really, he said, done so badly in the exam. The "viva" had happened to catch him on one of his "off-days": if he took the exam. again at the end of the winter session he would probably get through—"If you think it's worth while," he added.

"Worth while? What do you mean by that?"

"Well . . . I don't know. This medical business hasn't exactly been a howling success. I've been five years at it already, and I'm not so very much for'ader. The luck seems to have been against me, and it isn't as if I felt passionately keen about Medicine: I can't put my hand on my heart and swear I have anything like a 'vocation'. Of course, it's for you to decide, Dad—you pay the piper—but honestly I shouldn't like you to imagine I'd eat my heart out if we decided to chuck it."

"And lose these five years of work?"

"Sensible people occasionally cut their losses, Dad. These five years haven't been exactly profitable, have they? If I'm not going to bring it off, wouldn't going on be rather like throwing good money after bad?"

"You know quite well you're no fool. You can bring it off if you want to."

Matthew laughed uneasily. "That's just it. I'm not sure I do."

John Bradley flinched: in those five casual monosyllables he heard a sentence of demolition pronounced on the ambitious structure into which, during the last seven years, he had built all his hopes. His ambitions were even older and more deeply rooted than that. He could remember how, on the night when Matthew was born, as he stood in that little room and thanked God for that miracle, he had

looked forward to the time when this son of his would become a doctor—not a humble drudge of a general practitioner like himself, but one of the great adventurers: the kind of doctor he might have been had he been blessed with the brains, the spirit and the material advantages of a man such as Lacey; how he planned that Matthew should be, as it were, an extension of himself, a victorious incarnation of dreams he had been forced to relinquish almost before they took shape; his proxy in life; his prime claim to immortality. Matthew's earlier failures, indeed, had forced him to diminish the scope of these ambitions and to accept, instead, a modified programme in which he contented himself with the thought of his son, still more efficient than himself, working with him as companion and partner in Sedgebury and finally taking over from his failing hands the practice he had built up. Now this edifice too had crumbled away, and Matthew was its destroyer. It was the cruel unconcern of the announcement that hurt him.

"I can't think you mean that," he said. "I suppose you realize what a deep disappointment this is to me?"

"Well, it can't be exactly a surprise, the way things have been going. You're always imploring me to be candid and all that; but when I *do* say what I feel you immediately cut up rough. After all," he went on, with a shade of malice, "when you come to think of it, it wasn't I who wanted to take up Medicine.

It was you who more or less shoved me into it. I was only seventeen. I expect losing Mother had made me a bit sentimental and I wanted to please you; but as a matter of fact I knew my own mind even then: you know perfectly well I wanted to go on with my classics and read for a scholarship at Oxford. If I'd done what I wanted, things might have turned out better. They couldn't have turned out worse, anyway."

John Bradley was silent for a while. The accepted idea of Matthew's medical career had become so much a part of the texture of his life that he could not readjust himself to deal with any other. The blow had fallen so numbingly on his mind that he neither felt nor resented the implication of his own part-responsibility for the catastrophe. He said lamely, at last:

"If you throw up Medicine, what do you want to do? You're twenty-two, and I'm not a rich man: you'll have to earn a living somehow or other."

"Well, I'm not a great musician or anything like that, but I seem to have a certain facility for composing tunes. If I studied music seriously . . ."

John Bradley broke in with a laugh in spite of himself.

"That doesn't seem very practical to me, I must confess. How d'you propose to live in the meantime?"

"I know I can live with Aunt Janet as long as I like—if you're not prepared to have me," he added defiantly. "And I'm sure I could get a small job on

the stage, in a musical comedy chorus or something like that. George Perks could help me: he knows lots of theatrical people."

"A musical-comedy chorus-boy? God in heaven, Matthew, are you mad?"

"You're prejudiced, Dad: you know nothing whatever about them. I'm all for an easy-going life, and they're not a bad crowd on the whole."

"A crowd of mincing nancies and raddled whores! If you said you wanted to start life again as a grocer's assistant I could have understood it more easily. If you'd told me . . ."

The surgery-bell rang. John Bradley pulled himself up. He was glad of the interruption, of any activity that might divert the flood of his scorn and anger. He went, seething, and muttering to himself, to a house half a mile away, where a wretched old man named Abner Beazeley lay choking with broncho-pneumonia. He rigged up a steam-kettle to fill the room with vapour and took the invalid's son back with him to fetch an expectorant mixture. He was a sturdy young man, thick-set, with steady blue eyes, who was doing well for himself in Furnival's colliery. He seemed to be deeply concerned by his father's illness and begged John, quite unnecessarily, to do all that he could for him.

"I'd like our dad to have the best of attention," he said; "he've been a good father to all on us, and I'm the eldest. Yo' send in the bill to me when yo've

finished with the old chap and don't spare no expense. I may not be able to pay the lot at one go, but yo'll get your money all right, never fear of that."

His anxiety, his transparent straightness, and his strong sense of filial decency touched John Bradley's heart: in its present state it was unusually susceptible to emotion. Old Abner Beazeley, he thought, was fortunate in his son; these working-class Sedgebury folk were real people; he respected and understood them—which seemed natural enough, when he came to think of it, seeing that he himself had sprung from their class and in spirit still belonged to it. That was the real difference, and always had been, he told himself, between Matthew and him: they were the products of different kinds of life, different schools of thought and feeling. That was why he felt so completely at home with this stalwart young pitman, receiving his awkward confidences with complete understanding and sympathy: he was a man of the same material as himself, while Matthew, alas, however deeply he loved him, was not.

As they drew near to the corner of Crabb's Lane he noticed an unexpected light in the surgery window. It looked as though, during his absence, another call had come in, and Emma had kept the messenger; so he took out his latch-key and entered the surgery through the waiting-room. It was empty, and so was the dark consulting-room beyond; the light came from the dispensary beyond the partition. Perhaps,

in his distracted mood, he had neglected to turn down the gas-jet; he felt slightly annoyed by this extravagance, for of late he had been particularly sedulous in small economies.

It was only when he approached the partition that he became aware that somebody was moving in the dispensary. As he turned the corner, Matthew slewed round to meet him; his haggard face gaped with surprise and alarm; it showed ghastly pale in the light of the incandescent burner. John Bradley was no less surprised.

"Hello, what are you doing here, Matthew? Anything wrong?"

Matthew laughed. "You gave me a start, Dad." He pulled himself quickly together. "I . . . well, as a matter of fact, I stepped out to get a breath of fresh air and saw the light shining in here. I thought you'd left it on by mistake, so I just popped in again to turn it down by the by-pass."

"Well, I want it in any case now. I have to put up some medicine. You might write the label: *One tablespoonful every four hours: Mr. Abner Beazeley.* And just make an entry in the day-book as well: *Abner Beazeley, Pump House Buildings: Visit and Medicine.*" He glanced over Matthew's shoulder as he wrote. "What a mess you've made of it! Your handwriting's worse than mine."

"It's about time you had a new pen-nib."

"Better write the label again."

He sent young Beazeley home with his bottle of medicine and a few words of encouragement, then put out the surgery lights and returned with Matthew to the sitting-room. It was now late, and there seemed nothing for them to do but go to bed: Matthew yawned and moved slowly towards the foot of the stairs: it looked as though he were not even going to say good night. John Bradley could not bear it. It seemed to him a dreadful thing that two human beings who, even if they did not love one another, were so closely linked by community of experience and interest, and, but for each other, were so lonely, should go their ways in resentment and anger. He called: "Matthew!" and Matthew turned. "Yes, Dad?" he said.

"Come and sit down, boy. Let's finish our talk before we turn in. You'll be off early to-morrow and I can't leave matters between us as they are."

"All right." Matthew returned obediently to the sofa and sat with his head in his hands. "Is there anything more to be said?"

"I can't think you mean what you told me. It came as a blow to me, and I can't get over it yet. I don't think I should ever get over it if you were to throw in your hand, and I don't believe you'd do so if you realized what a bitter disappointment your giving up Medicine would be to me. When one's set one's heart on a thing for many years it becomes part of one, and giving it up is like tearing oneself to pieces. That's

what I felt like to-night; and I can't think you know your own mind."

"Perhaps not. I don't seem to be much good at anything—not even at that. But I'm perfectly all right so long as people will only have the sense to leave me alone."

"I won't leave you alone; I can't: you're too dear to me, Matthew. I've no right to leave you alone. I'm not talking cant when I say it's my duty to save you from making a mess of your life—and mine too—just because your luck's been out, as it has in some ways, and everything hasn't gone on according to plan. Don't forget that you took a first-class in Anatomy a couple of years ago. Since then you've been ill and things haven't gone so well. But you still have the brains you had then; you're still the same person, and there's no reason on earth why you shouldn't do just as well in Pathology if you put your back into it. And isn't it pretty rotten for me, if it comes to that, to feel that all the money I've slaved for during the last twenty years, and all the hard work we've done together, have gone for nothing?"

"Of course, it's rotten for you. I know all about that. The trouble is: I *am* rotten."

"Now you're simply talking damned nonsense. You know you're nothing of the sort." John Bradley sat down on the sofa beside him and put his arm round his shoulder. "Look here, Matthew, let's both forget what we've said this evening; let's try to make a fresh

start. Go on with your hospital work as if nothing had happened, and have another shot at your 'third' in December. Get qualified, anyway. Even if you decide in the end that you don't want to practise medicine, it'll be all to the good. You'll have something to fall back on if other things fail."

Matthew gave a deep sigh. His lips trembled, his eyes were troubled. It looked, for a moment, as though he were going to break down, and the sight of this weakness touched John Bradley profoundly. He leant towards him and embraced him with the impulsive tenderness he might have shown to an unhappy child. Matthew, too, seemed touched. When he spoke there were tears in his eyes and his voice was broken.

"All right, Dad," he said. "I'll have one more shot at it if you like. But it'll be no use blaming me if I don't bring it off."

"But of course you'll bring it off," John Bradley told him. "If you were really yourself you wouldn't be talking like that. This hopelessness only means that you haven't got over your illness. You need something to give you confidence. I'm sure it would set your mind at rest, and I should be happier too, if you got some first-rate man—Weldon, or Lacey, if you'd prefer it—to examine you. If you like, I'll write Lacey a letter . . ."

"Don't do that, for God's sake," Matthew flared up suddenly. "There's no earthly need for anything

of the sort. Haven't I told you a dozen times that there's nothing wrong with me? I'm perfectly all right. . . If people would only leave me alone," he added fiercely.

John smiled: "There you are! You get excited immediately. Which shows you're a pack of nerves. You can't expect to pass examinations if you're in a state like that. Be reasonable, my dear boy. Just tell Lacey I asked you to let him overhaul you."

"I'm not going to waste his time unless I'm forced to," Matthew said stubbornly.

"What nonsense you talk! He'd be delighted to have a look at you. You forget that Martin Lacey's my oldest friend. Anyone 'ld think you were frightened of being examined!"

"Well, I'll see how I am at the end of a week or two. I'm not going to make a nuisance of myself without any reason. At any rate I feel perfectly well to-night."

(III)

And indeed he looked it. All the haggardness John had noticed earlier in the evening was gone. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes shone, his manner was confident. When they parted outside Matthew's bedroom door, John Bradley felt sure that this dangerous corner had been successfully rounded and that for

another year at least the course would be clear. By the end of that year, Matthew would surely have come to himself again and would feel ashamed of his morbid hesitations. John was so flattered, indeed, by his triumph and so softened by Matthew's surrender, that he took no heed of what, had his mind been cooler and his emotions less confused by love and pity, might have appeared to him the most significant scene in that harrowing evening: his discovery of Matthew in the dispensary at the moment of his return from his "message". At that time he did not consider it unusual, because he was just as likely to find Matthew in the surgery as in any other part of the house. When he had asked him what he was doing there, his question had been casual and not in the least suspicious. He had accepted Matthew's answer as an explanation, not as an excuse, and had certainly never dreamt of doubting it, for, apart from the small defensive fibs of childhood, he had rarely known Matthew evade him, much less tell a deliberate lie.

It was only many months later that these incidents—himself bustling into the surgery with the patient's son; the sound of hurried movements behind the partition and the apparition of Matthew gaping at him with startled eyes, his haggard face illumined by the white light of the incandescent burner—leapt out of his memory with a novel and sinister significance. He did not even recall them when, one day in the following week, he opened the poison-cupboard to replenish the

hypodermic-case which he carried in his midwifery bag with quarter-grain tablets of morphine sulphate, and had found the stock of tubes which contained them surprisingly low. He merely wondered why he had failed to notice the deficiency before. Perhaps he had noticed it and forgotten: of late he had often been irritated by lapses of memory which, he supposed, like his failing sight for small print, were the natural penalties of middle-age. About that time he had several old patients on his list who were dying of cancer: no doubt he had used more morphine lately than he realized. He was more surprised but equally unconcerned when, on another occasion, he discovered that his stock of gelatine-coated morphine pills, tiny globules no bigger than a split grain of rice, had shrunk in the same way. It only showed, he told himself, how, when one was overworked and worried, one let things slide. He scribbled a postcard to his wholesale chemist—there were no restrictions on “dangerous drugs” in those days—ordered a new supply of pills and tablets sufficient to last him for a year, and thought no more of it.

He was not even perturbed by the rareness of Matthew's visits to Sedgebury, for he had taken to heart Janet's lecture on the evils of over-anxious parental control and the kind of reaction that might be expected as the result of his trying to regulate everything in Matthew's life. Janet had probably been justified when she said that it was ridiculous for

him to treat a grown man of twenty-two as if he were a child; and, hard though he found it to think of Matthew as being anything else, he decided that it would be not merely more just, but wiser, to leave him free to work out his own salvation. It was no good fussing or nagging, he told himself. The boy's nature was such that it could neither be coaxed nor driven. There were elements in it so alien to anything in his own composition that John Bradley had long since given up trying to understand them, and the quick temper that Matthew had shown that night did not encourage him.

It seemed odd, he was bound to confess, that once or twice, in the middle of the week and at hours when he was least expected, Matthew should have turned up at Sedgebury and departed almost immediately, leaving behind him a vague message with Emma or a scribbled note saying he had looked in on chance and had no time to wait. If he had so little time to spare as that, it seemed hardly worth while coming to Sedgebury at all—unless, of course, he had some matter to discuss which was urgent and yet could be dealt with in a few minutes.

"Are you sure that was all the message Master Matthew left, Emma?" (He was still 'Master Matthew' to her.)

"That's all, sir. Hurry isn't the word. He just says: 'Is Dad in, Emma?' and before I could get out an answer, he goes dashing into the surgery to

look for you, like, and finds yo' bain't there and comes back again. Then he says: 'Tell Dad I popped in, Emma, and say I'm sorry I missed him,' and off he goes."

"Was he looking all right, Emma?"

"Fair to middling. Master Matthew never looks what *I* should call right since he went to North Bromwich. Too much of this here studying, that's what I reckon."

John Bradley only hoped her diagnosis was correct. There was really no need, he assured himself, to be anxious on that score. As he had received no report from Lacey, he took it for granted that Matthew had not thought it necessary to consult him. During that winter and the following spring he himself was far too busy (and too conscious of his opponents' vigilance in taking advantage of his absence) to take an afternoon off and visit North Bromwich to see how things were going. He was disappointed, indeed, when Matthew reported that his work would not allow him to come home on Christmas Day—even more when he heard that he had decided not to sit for the Conjoint Board's next examination at Easter, though the excuse, in this case, seemed reasonable: it would be a pity, Matthew said, to abandon his attempt at gaining the more impressive North Bromwich degree in favour of a mere licence. John was only too glad to perceive any symptoms of re-awakened ambition or self-respect; and eventually his patience was rewarded,

for, at the end of the summer term Matthew passed his "Third."

The only thing that tempered John Bradley's satisfaction in this tardy achievement was the feeling—of which he found it impossible to rid himself—that Matthew no longer took any pleasure in his company and, whenever he could find a valid excuse, avoided it. His visits to Sedgebury grew rarer and more perfunctory. He only came home now when he wanted money; and his attitude, when he asked for it, was no longer apologetic: he demanded it as a right in a way that made John Bradley feel he regarded him as a convenient source of supply rather than as a father or even as a friend. In these days Matthew did not even talk to him about his work: the one subject in which, under the altered conditions of their personal relationship, they might have found a community of interest. He discouraged all John's enquiries into what he was doing at Prince's, and made it clear that he considered his other activities none of his father's business. John's only admissible business, so far as he could see, was to pay the piper. The tune remained Matthew's affair.

And, so far as it went, the tune he chose had not proved to be altogether unsatisfactory. He had satisfied his examiners in Pathology and was already at work on the two succeeding subjects, *Materia Medica* and *Forensic Medicine*, neither of which was regarded as a very formidable obstacle. As to his private life

and the problem of his health, John Bradley remained very much in the dark; and in Matthew's present mood he felt that any demand for light on them would hardly be welcome. He was prepared to leave it at that, feeling confident that if anything were amiss or even noticeably unsatisfactory, Janet Medhurst—who, in spite of her potentially dangerous tolerance, was at heart as anxious for Matthew's welfare as himself and was apparently more in his confidence—would surely have warned or consulted him. In this case, the wish fathering the thought, he preferred to believe that no news was good news. He had enough material preoccupations—the result of Furnival's pertinacious vendetta—to keep him busy without his bothering to meet domestic trouble half-way.

Yet such trouble—the dread of which had never completely subsided in the back of his mind—came, with startling suddenness, towards the end of the following year, in the shape of a telephone-call from Janet Medhurst. Her words and her manner were cryptic, and therefore the more alarming. She wanted to talk to him urgently, she said; but the subject could not be discussed with propriety over the telephone. Could he come into North Bromwich and see her—the sooner the better?

"Is it anything to do with Matthew?" he asked her eagerly.

She admitted—reluctantly, he thought—that Matthew was concerned in it.

"Can you manage to come early this afternoon?" she pressed him.

"After tea would be more convenient for me."

"Can't you make it earlier? I'd much rather see you at once if it's possible."

"Matthew isn't ill?"

"No . . . I don't think he's ill. I hope not."

"Can't you give me any hint of what it's all about?"

"I can't very well." The distant voice was distressed. "Much better wait till we meet. You will come at once, won't you?"

He was forced to leave it at that; for before he could ask another question Janet rang off. He scrambled as fast as he could through his morning round with a conscious-stricken sense of scamping his cases, his mind tortured by vain imaginings and panic terrors. As soon as his list was finished he telephoned Wills and asked him to hold the fort for a few hours that afternoon. Wills was down with bronchitis, his partner out at a case. Reluctantly, John Bradley rang up Boyle, who was only too glad of any excuse for displaying his charm and skill to a rival's patients. John's voice must have shown his anxiety, for Boyle asked him, with more curiosity than politeness, if anything was wrong.

"No, it's nothing of that kind," John told him hurriedly. "It's merely my sister-in-law, who wants to see me on business."

By this time he had only one thought: an over-

whelming desire to see Janet and know the worst as quickly as possible. For once he envied Boyle and Macrae their motor-car, which would have whirled him into North Bromwich in half an hour. There was no train from Mawne Road till half-past two. He arrived on the platform with twenty-five minutes to spare. He walked up and down it impatiently, and a group of factory girls, off on the spree, were so much amused by this odd apparition stalking to and fro with hard-set features in a shabby frock-coat and a round-topped felt hat that they went off into giggles and screamed with laughter behind his back.

Never before had the forty minutes of dawdling into North Bromwich seemed to him so painfully casual, nor had the Black Country landscape through which the train jolted on its way looked more blighted and more degraded. At the terminus, breaking his habit of economy, he hailed a taxi and was carried to Alvaston over the wet wood pavement of the Halesby Road at a pace which seemed to him reckless. He tugged twice, in rapid succession, at Janet's brass bell-pull, but nobody in the prim little house showed signs of having heard the bell tinkle somewhat remotely at the back. Then a slow-moving shadow fell like a ghost on the front door's panels of frosted glass, and the depressingly superior maid in her streamered cap admitted him.

"Miss Medhurst's expecting me," he said quickly, examining her impassive face in search of any shade

of expression betokening distress or calamity. There was none: her features were fixed like those of a wax-work automaton. When she said: "This way, please, sir," and he almost fell over her as she opened the drawing-room door on the right, he felt she regarded his eager precipitancy as a breach of good manners, that she had never been used to opening doors to people of his kind.

Janet rose from her writing-table to greet him with a quick smile. She appeared to him shrunken and older than when he last saw her, and the reading-glasses she had neglected to remove made her dark eyes inscrutable and cavernous. He took her in his arms and kissed her; he couldn't say why: he had never kissed her, indeed, since the day of his wedding.

"What is it?" he said.

Her composure was so exaggerated as to be frightening.

"Sit down, John," she said, "and I'll tell you. It was good of you to come so quickly."

"Something's happened. For God's sake tell me, Janet. He isn't . . ."

She shook her head.

"No, no . . . It's nothing like that. I can't tell you in a few words, so you'll have to be patient."

"Very well then."

He spoke resignedly, but was still on wires. Janet's low voice grew lower and quieter as she spoke:

"You know, John," she said, "or perhaps you don't,

that the money I live on comes mostly from Uncle Jacob's houses: he had a good deal of property in the jewellers' quarter and in all those streets at the back of Boulton Crescent. The collector goes round with a book every week and brings the rents in a bag on Saturday afternoons. Then I count it, you know, and enter the sums in a book of my own and put the money away in a drawer in my writing-table, ready for the bank on Monday. You see, they close early on Saturdays . . ."

"Yes, yes . . . of course."

"Well . . ." She paused, as though she were hesitating for a word. "Well, several times—four or five times perhaps—during the last six months, I've been worried because the money I found in the drawer didn't correspond with the figure I'd put down in my book. It was short, not by very large sums—never more than a pound or so—but the fact that it was short at all rather worried me."

"Ah . . ." John Bradley drew a deep breath. "I see . . . I see. . . ."

"At first, I thought I was probably wrong in my reckoning, though that didn't seem likely: I always took my time over it, and I learnt to be accurate with figures in Uncle Jacob's time: but when I checked things up later with the rent collector I found that I hadn't been wrong—the money was actually missing."

"You don't lock your drawer?"

"I didn't. Of course that was foolish. But

whether it was locked or unlocked I should have been equally worried. Things like that are so horribly unpleasant—with only four people in the house.”

“Yourself and two maids . . . and Matthew.”

“Yes. Hardly anyone else ever comes here. Hester, the housemaid, who let you in, is a pearl beyond price and entirely above suspicion. The cook is an elderly woman, a widow without any children. I couldn’t suspect the poor old thing in any case. As a matter of fact, she never sets foot in this room. I give all my orders in the kitchen, as I used to do when we lived at Boulton Crescent.”

“I see. That only leaves Matthew.”

“Yes. That leaves Matthew.”

“I find it hard to believe he could have any reason. He’s had a good deal more money from me than usual during the last six months.”

“From me, too, John. Not that I grudged it him, heaven knows.”

“I had no idea of that. Of course, I knew you spoiled him in lots of other ways. But you see . . . if we’ve both been giving him money, why on earth . . . ? This paragon who showed me in just now: does she know where the money’s kept?”

Janet shook her head.

“I don’t think so. But even if she did . . . Unfortunately, there’s something else.”

“Something else, Janet? What d’you mean?”

“After what I’ve told you happened I began to

lock the drawer. I locked it last Saturday afternoon, three days ago. When I came to unlock it this morning to take the money to the bank, it wasn't there. The money, I mean. More than thirty pounds. I think the lock has been forced or pushed back or something. I don't understand locks; I wish you'd look at it, John."

He examined it.

"Yes . . . it isn't much of a lock and the drawer doesn't fit too well. It's been levered open. Thirty pounds! This is dreadful, Janet."

"It's not really any more dreadful than thirty shillings. I don't mind the money. If he had asked me for it . . ."

"Did you speak to Matthew about all these earlier thefts?"

"No. I didn't like to. You see, I felt perfectly sure who it was, and I thought . . . well, perhaps he was in a tight corner of some kind."

"Have you seen him since the thirty pounds went?"

"Not since I found it was gone. I couldn't speak to him anyway: he wasn't here. I've not seen him since Saturday evening."

"Not seen him since Saturday evening?"

"Don't get so alarmed, John. He was staying the week-end with friends of his—only a few hundred yards away from here, as a matter of fact."

"What friends?"

"The Perks. I believe you know Dr. Perks."

"Only by name. When should Matthew be back, Janet?"

"Between six o'clock and seven's his usual time. When he goes to the Perks' his visits are rather elastic. He may not come back till to-morrow."

"You can't wait for that. I'm surprised you didn't get at him this morning. We must do it now. Here we are, the two of us, talking as though we were perfectly sure he's responsible for this beastly business without giving the boy a chance to tell us he isn't. I'll say one thing for Matthew, anyway. If you put a straight question to him he'll tell you the truth."

Janet Medhurst shook her head.

"He doesn't always tell *me* the truth, John . . . not lately. For the last six months or a year he's been . . . different in many ways. You see him so rarely that you'd hardly notice them. Little things . . ." Her voice tailed away.

"Where will he be at this moment?" John Bradley looked at his watch. "Half-past four, and it's Monday, isn't it?"

"Monday . . . yes. I'm so upset I can't think. At a lecture, anyway: either Medicine or Surgery."

"We'd better telephone to the University. Do you know the number?"

"I think it's three-six-five: the same as the days in a year. The telephone's in the hall, John. Just outside here on the left."

"All right. I'll see to it."

John Bradley went to the telephone and rang up the Faculty of Medicine. The porter answered him from his box. He confirmed Janet's supposition that Matthew would be in the lecture-theatre.

"If it's so urgent I'll just slip along and tell Mr. Bradley he's wanted," he said. "What name shall I give, sir?"

"Dr. Bradley: his father."

"Very good, sir."

John heard the noise as he put down the receiver and the echo of leisurely footsteps dying away as he walked with a measured tread down the concrete corridor. After a lapse of time that seemed endless, he heard the same steps returning. The receiver clicked; the man spoke:

"Mr. Bradley's not there, sir."

"Are you perfectly sure?"

"I went to the theatre myself, sir."

"Very well. Thank you very much."

Janet was standing in the drawing-room doorway. Her voice startled John Bradley as she spoke:

"Isn't he there, John?"

"No. The man went and looked for him. I'd better try the hospital."

The porter at Prince's proved to be no more helpful. Mr. Bradley, he said, had not been seen in the hospital since Friday. He knew that, as it happened, because the house-surgeon had been asking for him

only that morning. He reckoned Mr. Bradley must be ill.

"Hadn't you better ring up the Perks's house?" Janet said. "The man may be right. Matthew may have got one of his headaches. The number's Alvaston two-four-three, John, I think. You'll see it almost in front of you: Matthew wrote it on the wall."

John rang up again. Immediately a woman's voice answered him.

"This is Dr. Bradley speaking," he said. "Is Mr. Matthew Bradley there?"

"Matthew Bradley?" The voice expressed astonishment. "No, Dr. Bradley: I haven't seen him for weeks. I'm Mrs. Perks, by the way."

"How d'you do. I'm so sorry to trouble you like this, but I'm rather anxious, Mrs. Perks. I understood Matthew was staying with you."

"Well . . . This is the first I've heard of it. There must be some misunderstanding, I think. He stayed with us once for a fortnight; but that must have been a couple of years ago. I'm sorry . . ."

"Is your son there, Mrs. Perks?"

"George? I think I just heard him come in. Would you like to speak to him?"

"I'd much sooner see him, if possible. It's rather urgent."

"Are you speaking from Sedgebury, doctor?"

"No, no. I'm quite close: at my sister-in-law's, Miss Medhurst's in Meadows Lane. The last

house on the left. I'm sure your son knows it."

There was quiet for a few moments possessed by indefinite rumours of sound and ghostly voices and clearer snatches of speech, in which two North Bromwich business men were discussing a round of golf. Then another hard voice from the Alvaston Exchange intervened: "Finished, please?" it snapped.

"No, no . . . Don't cut me off. I've not nearly finished," John shouted.

"Hello. Are you there?"

It was Mrs. Perks again. A kindly voice, John thought: a gentlewoman.

"George is coming round at once in the car," she said.

"So many thanks. That's awfully good of you."

"I do hope there's nothing seriously wrong?"

"I don't know. I hope not. Your son may help us."

John Bradley hung up the receiver.

"George Perks is coming round immediately," he said. "Matthew's not been to their house since he spent his holiday with them."

"But he's been there for the night five or six times quite lately. And once, when I sent him a message, George told me he'd give it him, so he must have been there, John."

"Not necessarily. This young man may easily have been shielding him."

"Let's go back to the drawing-room."

Janet Medhurst sat down patiently. She had taken off her glasses. John saw that her dark eyes, magnificent as ever, were hurt and frightened. He felt sorry for Janet, finding her pitiful. It seemed wrong to him that her quiet harmless life should have been invaded by this crisis of melodrama. Since it had to be faced, he determined that he must deal with it himself and soften its impact on her as much as possible.

In the meanwhile, they thrashed the matter over again, though it seemed as though every essential aspect of it had been covered already. He examined her even more closely on the subject of Matthew's absences, on the recent change in his nature which her story suggested, on the lies he had told. She was suffering, he felt certain, almost as much as himself; doing her utmost to defend Matthew and to excuse him when the words he forced from her condemned. More than once her obvious hesitation in answering troubled him. The longer they talked, the deeper his suspicion grew that her affection for Matthew and her anxiety to shield him were making her tell him a little less than the truth.

"Why do you hesitate like that?" he implored her. "Can't you see that if you're not utterly candid you're tying my hands? I feel certain you're keeping back something, Janet. For God's sake tell me."

She shook her head and gazed at him piteously. He spoke at a venture:

"Has he been drinking, Janet?"

"No, no. Only once or twice. When young men go out together at night it's only to be expected; there's really not much harm in it."

"Is he mixed up with some woman?"

"Not to my knowlege. How should I know? He likes women, of course. That's natural too, isn't it?"

"That actress—what was her name?—Delabere?"

"No, no. I'm sure that's all over, if there ever was anything in it. I found her photographs in the waste-paper basket."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish—though that may not be a good sign. Perhaps there's another."

She smiled faintly: "Don't they say there's safety in numbers."

"They do; but I'm not too sure of it." Even as he spoke, there came back to him the conviction that for some unknown reason she was still trifling with him, still playing for time. He turned on her fiercely:

"You trying to lead me away, Janet. I'm more certain than ever you're keeping something back. Let's have the whole truth for God's sake. It's only fair to me and yourself; only fair to Matthew."

She let her clenched hands fall in a gesture of despair and surrender.

"Yes . . . There is something else," she said miserably. "I don't know what to think. It may not mean very much. Will you promise me, if I tell you, not to be angry with him?"

"Angry! What do you mean? I'm past being angry: I'm suffering. What is it?"

She moved hurriedly to the writing-table, unlocked a glazed pigeon-hole and returned with something hidden in the hands which were clasped to her breast. She spoke in a rapid whisper:

"When I missed the money that morning, I did what I suppose I oughtn't to have done. I went straight up to Matthew's room and turned out his chest of drawers in case he might have hidden it. The money, of course, wasn't there; but I did find these."

She held out her hands and opened them. John Bradley saw a glass hypodermic syringe, a dozen or more slender glass tubes that had once contained tablets, and a small brown bottle, its label defaced by scraping with a knife, in the bottom of which was stuck a yellowish gelatine-coated pill. He took the collection from her and gazed at them, unbelieving.

"So that's what it is," he said slowly. "My God. . . . My God!"

The front-door bell tinkled gaily in the back of the house. With a quick protective movement of shame or shyness, John Bradley slipped the incriminating objects of evidence into his pocket. Janet stood with clasped hands, her eyes fixed on his in agonized entreaty, as though she expected him to explain himself further. The maid opened the drawing-room door and announced "Mr. Perks". John saw Janet Medhurst's face change, miraculously assuming a

mask of conventional politeness: she even achieved a smile as she shook hands with George Perks and asked him to sit down. Her composure was so complete that John would not have been surprised if she had spoken of the weather. He himself was incapable of any polite pretences. His mind was still stunned by the blow it had just received. Though he found himself mechanically clasping the large white hand of George Perks and murmuring "Good afternoon", there must have been something intimidating in his presence, for the young man, who had entered the room with a swagger, looked cowed and uneasy as he sat down in Jacob Medhurst's gilt arm-chair, glancing nervously in Janet's direction, as though he were anxious to assure himself that her smile was friendly.

John Bradley looked him up and down as he took his seat. He was a burly, large-limbed fellow with a weak, good-humoured face that looked oddly puzzled and infantile beneath this harsh scrutiny. It seemed strange to John Bradley that this overgrown child, this flabby hulk of unintelligence should ever have exercised any influence over Matthew's far subtler mind: George Perks might be soft or vicious or foolish, but there was nothing sinister about him. He came to the point abruptly:

"I'm Matthew's father," he said. "I believe you're his closest friend; he's often spoken of you. We want to know where he is."

George Perks writhed clumsily in his chair, his soft white hands intertwined: John noticed a large ring set with a turquoise on one of his fingers; his voice, when he spoke, was cultivated—a light, suave voice.

"Well, really . . ." He hesitated. "To tell you the truth, I can't say."

"You mean you don't know?"

"Well, I suppose he's at Prince's, isn't he?—or else at the University."

"He's supposed to have been staying with you this week-end."

"Yes. . . . So Mother told me. But he wasn't, you know. I've not seen him, to tell you the truth, for more than a week. But he'll turn up all right. I shouldn't be worried if I were you."

"Did he ask you to say he was staying with you?"

"No, not this time. I've told you already I've not seen him for more than . . ."

"Not this time? That means he's asked you to shield him before in that way?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, we had a sort of little arrangement. Matthew and I are good pals, and if either of us wanted an alibi. . . . But really, you know, there was no harm in it. Nobody was any the worse for it. It was just a convenience. I mean to say—well, a chap doesn't want his people to go poking their noses into everything that he does: that's only natural. And old Matthew's all right, you know. You can take my word for it."

"Does he owe you any money?"

George Perks's eyes brightened.

"Well, now that you've mentioned it, as a matter of fact he does."

"How much?"

"I lent him a tenner a couple of years ago and another last month. I'm an awful ass about money, you know," he added ingenuously, "and he told me—but don't repeat it to him for God's sake!—that he was in a bit of a hole. Well, you know what it is. I'm not worrying about it: he paid me back five on Saturday."

"I thought you hadn't seen him for more than a week?"

Mr. Perks smiled slyly: "That's a bit awkward, isn't it? Looks as if I'd dropped a brick there. As a matter of fact I *did* see him."

"You don't know where he is now?"

"On my honour, I don't. I've told you that already."

"Have you any idea where he might be?"

George Perks shook his head. John Bradley knew he was lying again. Was there any way of making him speak the truth? He measured his customer and guessed that he might be frightened.

"Look here, my young man," he said threateningly. "I don't like the sound of this 'little arrangement' of yours, and what's more, I don't imagine your father would like it. I think he and I had better look into

this business together without any further delay, as we're both concerned in it."

George Perks gave a jump. "Oh, I say, damn it all, sir, you wouldn't do that. After all, what I've said this afternoon was more or less in confidence. As a matter of fact the guv'nor and I are not on the very best of terms at the moment, and a new full-dress row, so to speak, would just about put the lid on. To tell you the truth . . ."

"That's just what I want you to do."

"And let down a pal?" The suggestion shocked Mr. Perks.

"You haven't told me the truth. I asked you just now if you'd any idea where Matthew was, and I don't believe your answer. On the whole you'd be wiser to think again. You're in this as well as Matthew, don't forget that. I'm not interested in your part of the little arrangement. It's your father's business, not mine. But Matthew's *is* my business, you see, and you're going to tell me all you know about it at once."

George Perks went exceedingly red in the neck and contemplated the turquoise ring on his little finger as though he expected to draw inspiration from it. He stole a swift glance at Janet Medhurst. Her pale face was adamant.

"I don't call this exactly cricket, you know, sir," he said regretfully.

"Call it just what you like. I want to know what you know or what you suspect. For your own sake

you'd much better tell me. You're the last person who saw him, apparently. At six o'clock on Saturday evening—if you're telling the truth."

"Oh, that's perfectly true, sir. I'll take my oath on it."

"Since then he's been missing."

"Good Lord! You don't say so?" Mr. Perks perpended. He swallowed and spoke, with lowered eyes:

"Well, I don't want to let the poor old chap down, sir, but it's just possible this may have something to do with a girl he's keen on."

"What's her name?"

"I'm hanged if I know her surname: I've a rotten memory. Yes I do, though, by Jove! It's just come back to me. Judith Tremelling. We call her Judy."

John Bradley took out his notebook and put down the name.

"Who is she? What does she do?"

"Well, she doesn't do much except at this time of the year. I suppose you'd call her an actress. She has a small speaking part in the pantomime at the Queen's. Last year she was in the chorus."

"Where does she live?"

"Now there you've got me. I don't know the number. It's one of those houses in Easy Row, just opposite the hospital: they're all theatrical lodgings. It's . . . let me see . . . about seven doors from the pub. You can't really miss it because the door's newly-

painted bright green and there's a parrot in the front window."

"That's all I want, thank you. Good afternoon."

John closed his notebook and opened the door. He did not offer his hand. George Perks, confused by this peremptory dismissal rose awkwardly and moved over to Janet.

"I'm most frightfully sorry this has happened, Miss Medhurst," he said. "I'm sure it will turn out all right, though." John still grimly held the door open. George Perks paused as he passed. "Look here, sir," he said. "You're not going to give me away now, really, are you? To my guv'nor, I mean? Old Matthew would quite understand, but I'm afraid the guv'nor wouldn't."

John Bradley did not answer. George Perks, his flabby bulk oddly diminished, passed out.

"Thank goodness that's over," Janet sighed.

John Bradley did not answer her. He went out into the hall and put on his coat. "Will you telephone Dr. Boyle at Sedgbury," he said, "and ask him if he'll be so kind as to take any urgent calls for me until I come home? I'm going to Easy Row."

"Let me 'phone for a taxi first, John. It's raining fast."

"I can walk there in less than ten minutes. A spot of rain won't hurt me. I'm used to it."

Indeed, during that fateful walk to Easy Row, John Bradley was hardly conscious of the deluge that lashed

his face or the water that splashed from the puddles he did not attempt to avoid. He walked so rapidly that the sight on his left of the Hospital's lighted windows glimmering through the rain came to him as a surprise. He crossed the empty roadway at the point where the frosted windows of "The Trees" public-house advertised Astill's Entire. From this point a row of squat early-Victorian houses coated with stucco provided a façade of questionable respectability to the congested slums in which he had "done his cases." Even in his student-days, the houses in Easy Row had carried the stigma of a dubious reputation as the lodgings of the cheaper kind of "theatricals" and women who used their connection with the theatre to cover the practice of an easier profession. John Bradley had never entered any one of them. He approached them now with an odd mingling of awe and distaste.

It seemed as though George Perks's directions would not help him much in his search. The small, sinister houses stood back from the road, and the feeble light of the rain-bleared gas-lamps hardly penetrated beyond the line of rusty railings that separated them from the pavement. With a vague idea of the position of the house he sought he made straight for Number Seven which the glow from a red blind differentiated from its neighbours. He found the door was newly painted a glossy green, so it looked as if he had made a good shot; but the bell-pull beside

it seemed to have been disconnected, for all the sound it produced was a scraping of loose wires. He abandoned this useless mechanism and hammered on the door. Wet paint came away on his fist. It seemed that George Perks's acquaintance with Number Seven must be more recent than he had suggested.

A stout, middle-aged woman, with a blotched face and a tousle of grey hair that resembled a deserted rook's nest, opened the door to him. He asked if Miss Tremelling lodged there.

"That's right, dearie, that's right," she mumbled. "Judy's just about finishing her tea, but I dare say she'll see you."

She pushed open the door of the room with the red blind. It dragged inwards, with a tinkle of brass rings, a velveteen portière.

"Gent to see you, dearie," she said.

It was a small square room so cluttered with furniture that there was hardly space to stand in it. Nor was there anywhere to sit, for the chairs and the sofa were strewn with an untidy collection of cardboard boxes, flowered hats, blouses, stockings and soiled female underwear. The room reeked with cheap scent. As he breathed it John Bradley couldn't help feeling that this sickening perfume accentuated rather than masked other frowsy odours—including that of the kippers the remains of which its occupant was just washing down with her last half-cup of tea.

Miss Tremelling was a comely but rather blowsy

young woman, with a plump, good-natured face and masses of coppery hair. She had wide-set, long-lashed blue eyes heavily dressed with mascara, which made them look even bigger than they were, and a small nose whose tilt gave her face an impudent air. But what John noticed more than these was her mouth: a large, loose mouth with crimson lips so badly painted that they distracted attention from every other feature. When she saw John's rain-soaked figure standing in the doorway she swilled her last mouthful down hurriedly and composed the predominant lips into a wide, inviting smile disclosing two rows of teeth which, though clean and sound, made him suddenly shiver. The incisors were slightly notched, and his medical eye knew at once what they signified. They were Hutchinson's teeth: the unmistakable sign of hereditary disease.

However ill-timed his arrival might have been, Miss Tremelling was not disconcerted. She crossed her legs high in their tubular skirt, and winked.

"Well, this *is* a surprise," she said. "Who'd have thought of seeing you, Herbert?"

"My name's Bradley," John said. "Dr. Bradley. I'm Matthew's father."

The smile mercifully left her red mouth. Her face quickly assumed an insolent, defensive air.

"Oh, so that's who you are? Fancy that, now. Come to think of it, I might have guessed. He's like you, isn't he? Well, what of it, anyhow?"

"I want to see him."

"Who told you Matthew was here?"

"Never mind who told me. Where is he?"

"How should I know?" she flounced up, snatched at one of the flowered hats and began to put it on, standing with her back to him in front of the mantel-piece mirror. John had the impression that she was watching his reflection in the glass, probably playing for time. She was taller than he had imagined, with a well-shaped figure. She spoke without turning to face him, a hat-pin in her teeth:

"It strikes me you've got a pretty fine bloody nerve, whoever you are, to come barging into a lady's rooms like this, without so much as a by-your-leave. I should like to know what you take me for, anyhow. You just wait till I've got this hat on!"

She gave the brim a vicious wrench which brought it into a position which was not, in fact, unbecoming. She slewed round and glared at him, angry, and a little puzzled that he had not answered her.

"Look here," she said, "I don't know what the hell you think you're doing here; but I've no time to waste. I'm off, and next time you come round let me know you're coming and I'll see you're not let in."

John stood with his back to the door and barred her way.

"You don't go till you've told me where Matthew is."

"Going to stop me, are you? We'll see about that."

You get out of my way or I'll call the police, and then you'll look pretty! Oh, come on, don't be soft. I've got my living to earn."

"Where's Matthew?"

"Oh, cut it out! What the hell's that to do with me?"

She was watching her chance and made a dash for the door. John Bradley was there before she could reach the handle.

"You dare touch me, you dirty great beggar!" she shouted. "Take your hands off me quick, or I'll——"

Before she had finished the sentence he knew what she meant to do. She had plucked the steel hat-pin out of her hat: it was within a few inches of his face when he caught her wrist and twisted it away.

"Ah . . . you're hurting me, hurting me!" she screamed. "Let me go . . . let me go!" She writhed in his grip so fiercely that he could hardly hold her; she fought like a wild cat, madly kicking and scratching, till he managed to catch the other wrist and pinioned both her arms. For a moment she continued to struggle vainly, gasping and panting, till, seeing that she was mastered, she relaxed her straining muscles and scowled at him with sullen hate in her eyes. Then she blinked; her angry eyes softened; her painted lips parted in a slow smile.

"Well, you are a cave-man, aren't you?" she said, with impudent candour. "What's next on the programme, eh? Come on, be a sport, dear, and let me

go. I'm in for a hell of a row as it is. Come on, then; there's a good chap. And just look what you've done to my poor bloody hat, putting your great clumsy foot in it. You ought to buy me a new one by rights." She laughed shortly: "Well, this has been a party and no mistake!"

"You can go when you've told me all about Matthew," John Bradley said.

Miss Tremelling sighed: "Oh well, have it your own way, dear: I'll tell you. But promise me first you won't be too hard on him. He's a nice kid, is Matthew—I told you he's like you, didn't I?—and I'm not going to have him used roughly on my account, not by you or anyone, see?"

"I shan't use him roughly. Don't worry about that." He was almost touched by this unexpected tenderness.

"If you did I'd never forgive you. He's not like other boys. I don't mean he's a nancy or anything like that"—she giggled: "well, *I* ought to know, anyway, hadn't I?—but he's different, more sensitive like, as the saying is; he makes a girl feel she wants to look after him. Perhaps, partly, it's having no mother. The first time we ever met he told me about that. He's never got over it, you know."

John Bradley nodded. "I know."

"Well, Matthew and me, we've been friends for a long time now. It must have been nearly three years ago at the Prince's when that old bitch Cora Delabere

was after him. I was in the chorus then, but I've got some lines in this show," she added, ingenuously. "Well, we're friends, as I say, and now and then we have a good time together—you know what I mean. He works too hard, that poor boy. As I always say, that's what gives him those awful headaches." The pain he suffers, poor lamb, it's enough to break your heart, though, thank God, he's got hold of some medicine now that seems to ease it."

"Yes, yes; but you've not told me where he is."

"Why, of course, he's upstairs, dear. He came to the show Saturday night. The poor boy was so blue and strange-like, I made him come home with me. When he gets these turns I can usually put him right. And then yesterday—Sunday that is—one of these headaches came on: the worst one I've ever seen him have, and that's saying something! When he gets them as bad as that he goes pretty near cracked, and no wonder! Says he wishes to God he could die and get out of it. Of course, I'm used to his talking like that now and take no notice of it, and when he'd taken a good dose of his medicine he quieted down a bit, though he couldn't sleep, mind, I could hear him talking to himself and groaning all night, and this morning he told me it wasn't any better. That's the worst of medicines, isn't it?—when you take them continually they always lose their effect."

"Go on, go on . . ."

"Well, I made him a cup of tea, but he couldn't

face it; he was so bad he could hardly speak. He said: 'Judy, the damned stuff's not acting. I can't stand this much longer. I'm going to take a dose that'll settle it this time.' And I said: 'All right, boy, but don't overdo it,' and he said: 'I know what I'm doing: I've made a hell of a lot of mistakes, but I shan't make one this time. Give me a glass of water,' he said. So I gave him a glass of water and he swallowed his stuff. Then he asked me to hold his hand, and after a bit, poor lamb, he went off to sleep. And he's sleeping still, thank God! I've been upstairs four or five times and had a look at him. I know these headaches of his, I've seen so many of them: he'll be as right as rain when he wakes. But I shouldn't disturb him, if I were you, not just yet." She laughed: "Only hark at me! I keep forgetting you're a doctor. You can go upstairs, just to see he's all right, but you won't be rough with him, will you?—you promised me that. It's the first door on the left at the top of the stairs."

She turned hurriedly and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was half-past six.

"My God," she said, "you don't tell me that's the right time! I shall have to run all the way." She jammed on the crushed hat. "What the hell did I do with that pin?"

John Bradley picked the weapon up from where it had fallen and handed it back to her. She said: "Thank you, that's funny, isn't it?" and stuck it once more in her hat. Then she smiled rather wistfully

and held out her hand. "Good-bye, dear," she said. "You will be kind to him, won't you? I'm fond of Matthew, you know. And don't wake him just yet if he's still asleep."

John Bradley took her hand. It was warm and soft, but the grip was surprisingly firm, and her eyes, despite the disfigurement of the mascaraed lashes, now appeared to him honest and, in a way, gentle. For all his prejudices against her, he could not help feeling kindly towards this highly improper young woman. They had something in common. He believed she was fond of Matthew. When she said so her voice lost its vulgarity. Its tones had a dreamy tenderness.

"Thank you for what you've told me," he found himself saying, "I hope I've not made you too late."

Miss Tremelling stared at him incredulously, then burst out laughing.

"My God, you're a rum 'un, you are: half strangle a girl one minute and treat her the next as if she was the Princess of Wales. I *am* late, dear: I'm bloody late, if you want to know. However, who cares?" She tossed her red head and threw him a kiss from her painted lips. "So long, then. Tootle-oo!" John heard her yodelling to the landlady out in the passage. "Mrs. Mea-dows, Mrs. Mea-dows. The gentleman's going upstairs. It's all right. He's harmless. And if Mr. Bradley wakes up before I come back, mind you give him a nice cup of tea and some buttered toast. If I don't come back, love, you'll know it's all right and

I've only been drowned. Phew! It's coming down cats and dogs."

She was gone. John heard the old-fashioned latch of the front door fasten with a click. He passed out into the passage which smelt of linoleum and up the stairway in whose frowsy atmosphere it seemed as if the effluvia of all the meals Mrs. Meadows's lodgers had ever eaten and of all the frowsty clothes they had ever worn had been distilled and preserved. He opened the door on the left at the top of the stairs. He could see nothing inside it: at the back of the house there were no street-lamps to lighten it, and the gas was not lit in the passage below. No sound came from the room: if Matthew was there, he certainly still slept soundly. John searched in his pockets and found a match-box and struck a light. Amid the litter of pots for cosmetics, cups and saucers and cigarette-ends on the top of the dressing-table his eye caught the shape of a candle. He lit it, not without difficulty, and held it aloft.

The small bedroom revealed a confusion even more sordid than that of the sitting-room below. The air was thick with the odour of stale tobacco and scent and soiled clothes. The greater part of the room was occupied by a brass bedstead with a feather bed on the top of it, in a sunken depression of which a human form sprawled face downwards. John knew it was Matthew instantly by the way his dark hair grew at the back of the neck. As he moved to the bed, his foot

crunched on something brittle. Lowering his candle to find out what it was, he saw he had stepped on an empty brown glass tube with a greyish label, and, seeing it, he felt his heart leap and then go cold.

He called: "Matthew . . . Are you awake, boy?" and heard his voice tremble.

There was no answer.

He leant over the bed and clutched the outstretched forearm to feel the pulse. The skin was cold and clammy. When his fingers closed on the wrist he could feel no pulse at all. Wild terror seized him till, at length, the faint flutter of a thready impulse reached his finger-tips. He pulled the prostrate shape over on to its back. The skin of the face was clammy and chill as that of the forearm; the lips were livid; and—even more sinister to his practised eye—the tips of the ears were livid too. With one shaking hand he held the candle closer, with the other lifted an eyelid. The pupil, which in that faint light should have been moderately dilated, was closed to a pin-point. He laid down the candle on the bed and clasped his head with his hands. For a moment his shattered mind seemed incapable of thought or the impulse to action.

Then, suddenly, as with a burst of sunlight, his dark mind cleared. Habit, stronger than conscious thought reasserted itself: he was no longer a harassed, distracted man in face of a personal disaster, but a doctor dealing with the mortal emergency of a case. He hurried to the head of the stairs, scribbling as he

went a note in his pocket-book to the porter at Prince's. He shouted for the landlady. He even remembered her name: "Mrs. Meadows . . . Mrs. Meadows!" he called.

She came crawling, stunted and louse-like, along the passage beneath him; the candle she carried illumined her blotched upturned face, with its bird's nest of tousled grey hair.

"You've no call to holler like that," she grumbled. "I'm not deaf: I can hear you. If the policeman was out in the road he'd think it was murder."

"My son's ill. I want you to run over with a note to the hospital."

"Me go out on a night like this? What's wrong with going yourself, I should like to know?"

"Don't be a fool, woman. I'm a doctor. Hurry up, now. It's a matter of life and death."

"Life and death? That's a pretty business. I don't want no deaths in my house. I don't want no questions asked here. What's up, then?"

"My son's taken poison. Give the porter this note: I don't want to leave him."

"My God! Poison? What's that you're saying? It can't be true!"

The candlestick shook in her hand; the blotched face went dirty white. She began to blubber and whine: it was clear she had lost her head.

"You've got to get him away. . . . You must get him away," she whimpered, "before anyone knows.

I'm an honest woman, I am. I can't have my house dragged into a mess of this kind. It's always had a good name has my house: you ask the police. It's nothing to do with me: I swear it isn't. I swear to God I never knew as she'd taken a young man upstairs. I've kept a respectable house these twenty years. If anyone says the contrary . . ."

John Bradley saw there was nothing to be done with her. As he hurried downstairs to the door she clung to him still whining her protestations of innocence.

"Don't tell the police, mister," she implored him, "don't tell the police!"

He freed himself from her clutches and dashed over the road obliquely to the porch of the Prince's. An astonished porter gaped at his wild-eyed, hatless figure, then, suddenly recognizing him, touched his cap.

"Dr. Bradley, isn't it?"

"I want a stretcher at once and somebody to help me carry it. There's a case of morphine poisoning over the road. Tell them to get a bed ready and telephone Mr. Lacey. Give him my name, and say that I want him urgently."

"Very good, sir." The porter spoke without hurry or emotion: such demands were the commonplaces of his daily round. "But there's nobody on duty just now besides myself and I can't leave the telephone. Tell you what, sir, if it's only just over the road, as you

say, and seeing as it's yourself, I could ask the house surgeon on duty, Mr. Dakers, to give you a hand. He went into the Casualty Department two minutes ago to have a look at a drunk they've just brought in, and I'm sure he'd oblige."

"I'll find him myself. Get on with that telephone message."

He crossed the entrance hall to the Casualty Department where the Sister in Charge and a lumbering young man whom he recognized as Jonathan Dakers were putting the last stitch into the scalp of an obstreperous drunk while his fuddled friends held him down. The place looked like a shambles; Dakers' overall was dabbled with blood.

"Hello, doctor?" he said, with a cheerful smile. "What can I do for you?"

John Bradley explained. Dakers knitted his heavy brows:

"Good Lord . . . you don't say so? Of course I'll come at once. Sister, give me a hand with this overall: the patient can wait. Just keep an eye on him, you chaps, and see that he doesn't bolt."

They crossed the road with the stretcher to Number Seven. The green door was locked. When John Bradley hammered on it, the thick voice of the landlady answered:

"Who is it? You can't come in. Is that the police?"

John shouted to her to open at once. Her hands fumbled with the key. They pushed past her, carry-

ing the stretcher between them, and up the narrow stairs.

"My God, this is a frowsty hole!" Dakers muttered. "What on earth was he doing here?"

John Bradley felt Matthew's pulse. The beat was barely perceptible, irregular, and abnormally slow. They wrapped him in blankets and lifted him on to the stretcher.

"You go first, Dakers. Keep your end high: it's an awkward corner."

"Righto. Come along. I'm quite clear at this end."

They moved slowly downstairs. Mrs. Meadows, below, was whining and murmuring incoordinately. As they passed her she seemed to pull her senses together:

"Here, here . . . what d'you think you're doing," she screamed. "You can't take them blankets. They're mine—I tell you they're mine."

They paid no heed to her. She pursued them with foul-mouthed protests half-way over the road; then suddenly thought better of it and scampered back through the rain with her apron over her head. The porter opened the doors to let the stretcher in.

"I've telephoned Mr. Lacey," he said. "It's all right: he's coming. And there's a bed ready in the private ward outside Number Two. If you and Mr. Dakers will give him a lift we'll push the trolley under him. That's right, sir; that's right . . ." He stopped suddenly, aghast, with wide eyes and open mouth.

"Good Lord, sir, you never said it was Mr. Bradley. It give me a proper turn."

They wheeled Matthew along to the private ward and laid him on the bed.

"Are you certain it's morphine?" Dakers asked.

"Pretty certain. I found an empty tube of hypodermic tablets beside the bed, and his pupils are pin-points."

"We ought to get the stomach-pump working at once."

"Yes. Do what you like. My mind's a blank. I can't think. Lacey ought to be here in a moment."

"I'll give him a squirt of apomorphine and atropine to begin with."

Dakers told the nurse to sterilize a syringe and bring more hot-water bottles. John Bradley sat at the head of the bed, his fingers on Matthew's pulse. They felt a faint fluttering; but at times the impulse was so weak that he could not be sure the beating had not stopped. Dakers listened to the chest with a stethoscope and reassured him.

"Can't we whip up the heart a bit with caffein?" John asked. He found himself deferring humbly to this young man's judgment. If only Lacey would come!

"I've given him caffein already," Dakers was saying. "It's the respiration one has to worry about in these cases more than the heart. He must have had a pretty stiff dose, I'm afraid. The prick of my hypo-

dermic needle doesn't rouse him. So long as you can keep them awake there's always a better chance. How long ago do you think . . ."

Lacey entered the ward. At the sight of his calm, pale face John Bradley's heart quickened with hope. He took one swift glance at Matthew and frowned. "You didn't tell me . . ."

John shook his head. "I knew you'd come. There was no time to lose."

Lacey turned to Dakers and questioned him, nodding quick approval of all the steps he had taken. John Bradley was aware of the influence of a commanding presence as Lacey, taking no heed of him, went through with a rapid and systematic examination.

"I don't like this colour, Dakers," he said. "His ears are blue. You've done all you can to rouse him, of course?"

"He was completely comatose, it seems, when Dr. Bradley found him."

"Better leave nothing to chance. We'll wash out the stomach as well with a strong saline solution: ten grains to the ounce."

"I've got the pump ready, sir."

"The pulse . . . it's stopped beating!" John Bradley suddenly cried.

"All right, John, all right," Lacey took his arm firmly. "You're best out of this, my dear fellow. Much better leave him to me. Go and sit down in Sister's room."

"Nurse will give you a cup of tea, sir," the sister said gently.

John Bradley shook his head. He could not leave them. Lacey had taken his place at the head of the bed. He said, hurriedly: "Dakers!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't worry about that pump. He's stopped breathing."

"Artificial respiration, sir?"

"Yes. You begin. You're younger and stronger than I am."

John Bradley watched them working in turns. They did not notice him any longer. Although he stood motionless, his mind was taking part in their rhythmical labours, unconsciously identifying himself as it were, not so much with the rescuers as with the patient: filling his lungs when they raised Matthew's arms, expiring when the chest was compressed and expelled air sighed through his lips—as if he supposed that, by some miracle of sympathetic magic, he himself was contributing to Matthew's recovery. Thirteen times every minute, with a monotony that became oppressive, they performed the same series of movements; extending the limp arms above the head; bringing them down again; pressing them firmly against the chest. How long they went on, John Bradley's mind could not measure. The mere fact of watching and sharing each movement exhausted him. In the regularity of the process there was no inter-

mission. As soon as Dakers showed signs of fatigue Martin Lacey took his place. And the labour was gruelling. When he had finished his turn, Jonathan Dakers, powerful though he was, stood back and leant against the wall, breathing heavily, while Lacey's hair, against his pale brow, was dark and his face streaked with runnels of sweat.

At length Lacey turned and whispered to Dakers, who nodded. They both stood back, solemnly contemplating the still shape. The sister unfolded a sheet and spread it methodically over the bed from bottom to top. John heard his own strangled voice speaking:

"You're not giving up?"

Lacey put his arm round his shoulder.

"My poor old fellow. We've done all we can. It's no use going on. Better come home with me."

He found himself being shepherded by Lacey in the direction of the hospital's main entrance. The porter looked out of his lodge as they passed. His face eager with questions, fell as he saw the answer written in theirs. The man stood to attention and gave them a grave salute, which John Bradley mechanically returned. Lacey's chauffeur bustled round, opening the door of the car and wrapping a rug round John's knees. The car started and gathered speed, making for Alvaston, over the wet wood-pavement.

"Here we are," Lacey said. He switched on a light as they entered the house, revealing the picture-hung

corridor that led to the library: that lovely room which, many years ago, had impressed John so deeply with its air of ease and graciousness. Rossetti's version of Laura Munslow smiled down on him. Nothing had changed. Yet, oddly enough, the very qualities which he had once admired in that room—its refinement, its quietude—now evoked in John Bradley an unexpected reaction: the first feeling he had experienced since the impact of tragedy numbed him: a sense of fierce grudging against the existence of a beauty so stable, so coldly dispassionate in his desolate world. As that wave of bitterness smote him he came to himself.

"What on earth am I doing here?" he said harshly. "Why didn't you let me stay where I was?"

"You might just as well be here as anywhere else, my dear fellow," Lacey told him gently. "Just keep quiet for a bit."

"Keep quiet? How can I keep quiet? You're talking nonsense. How can I keep quiet when there's so much to be done?"

"There's nothing more you can do for the moment, John. Dakers will take things in hand at the hospital, and I'll see to everything else. Lie down on the sofa and put up your feet and close your eyes. You're incapable of thinking for yourself, so, for God's sake, let me think for you. You're my patient, remember, and you'd much better do as I tell you. Just relax and let everything go."

"I can't relax. I should lose control if I did. You see . . ." he hesitated . . . "I'm lost, I don't know where I am or what I ought to do next. I've no business here. I ought really to have gone to my sister-in-law's. That's where Matthew lived."

"Leave all that to me, John. I'll telephone her at once. What's her name?"

"Janet Medhurst. No, no, Martin: that won't do. I left her hours ago—I've no idea what time it is—and the poor girl must be waiting for me to come back. I must go and tell her myself. She'll be heart-broken. It's my job to stand by her."

Lacey looked at him shrewdly with calm, judicial eyes, as though he were weighing the advantages to two stricken hearts of communion in distress. He said:

"Well . . . Perhaps you're right, John. It might be better for both of you. Does she live in Alvaston?"

"Yes. Meadows Lane. It's only a few hundred yards."

"All right. The car will take you."

"I might just as well walk. I'd rather."

"You're not fit to walk. You need all your strength. I'll drive you myself and wait till you've told her."

"No, no, that won't do. I ought to stay with her. There's my work, too: I'd quite forgotten it; but I suppose I can't possibly get back to Sedgebury to-night."

"Back to Sedgebury? You mustn't dream of it, John."

"But I must. I'm single-handed. I've one or two cases that I simply must see."

"Don't worry about them, my dear fellow. I'll see that a locum is sent out to-morrow morning. I know a good man I can easily put my hand on."

"If I don't have my work or something to concentrate on I shall simply go off my head."

"If you wear yourself out any more you'll crack up, anyway. I'm your doctor for once, don't forget, and orders are orders. Just lie down for a moment while I send for the car."

He went. John Bradley obeyed him reluctantly. His eyes throbbed like live coals beneath his closed lids. After a moment or so Lacey returned with a medicine-glass half-full of brownish fluid.

"You'd better take this," he said, "before we go."

"What is it? I don't need drugging."

"Just a mild sedative. A drachm of Bromidia. It'll do you no harm."

John Bradley swallowed the draught. It was salty and bitter. He felt himself like a child in Lacey's hands. The sensation was novel to him, for he had never been ill in his life or submitted his will to another's. It was also oddly composing. Lacey watched him, smiling faintly, as he grimaced at the stuff's acidity; and, seeing him tired, kindly eyes at that moment, John Bradley was overwhelmed by a

wave of love and gratitude for this friend of his youth—his only friend, indeed—who had not merely shared this extreme of suffering but, even now, fortified his soul with strength and wisdom and serenity. In each of the major emergencies of his life, this man—so remote and immune, as it sometimes seemed, from human emotions—had stood by his side and braced him and saved his reason. As he gazed at Lacey now, his eyes filled with tears; and the mere fact of this loosening of the tense control that had kept him tearless resolved the unbearable pressure. He bowed his head and sat with his hands to his streaming eyes; his body shuddered, shaken with voiceless sobbing.

Lacey sat down beside him and laid a hand on his shoulder. Neither spoke or attempted to speak. They sat there a while in silence, these two middle-aged men who had known each other from boyhood: one shattered by present loss, the other shadowed no less by his more indefinite doom.

At length the beneficent paroxysm passed. John Bradley raised his sunk head and opened his eyes on a world which, though still inexpressibly desolate, seemed somehow saner and less confused than that of nightmare horror from which he had hardly emerged. His thoughts had once more become his own; he was no longer possessed. He clasped Lacey's hand and held it—almost as though he were still in need of that communicable force.

"You're a good friend, Martin," he said, in a voice that was not his own.

Lacey smiled. "Come along," he said. "The car's at the door."

(iv)

Matthew was buried in North Bromwich. It would have been more natural, perhaps, to have laid him beside his mother at Sedgebury; but sentiment, in the matter of the dead, had never weighed heavily with John Bradley. His son had died; his own heart was broken; and there was an end of it: he had no reserves of emotion to spare for such melancholy funeral pomps as Sedgebury would have expected of him; he had no intention of being gaped at or of providing a spectacle. Indeed, during the distressful days that followed the catastrophe, he found it increasingly hard to keep control of himself. Here, once again, he felt deeply indebted to Lacey, who found time, amid the inhuman pressure of his surgical work, to shoulder the greater part of the material burden.

From the moment when John had sent for him to come to the hospital, Lacey had been his guardian angel. Even on the day of Matthew's death he had performed the miracle of giving him a night's sleep: no doubt the draught he had forced him to take was more potent than he had admitted. On the following

morning he had been at Janet's door before John was awake with the news that a competent locum had been sent to Sedgebury. And that was not all: he took Janet Medhurst in hand and steered her through that period of critical emotion; he talked with the Coroner and the Chief Constable and the Editor of *The Courier*, by all of whom he was known and respected, and contrived, by his influence, that the inquest should be conducted with particular delicacy and as little publicity as was possible; he gave expert evidence at the inquest himself, with the result that, obeying the Coroner's tactful direction, a sympathetic jury brought in a verdict of Death by Misadventure and Miss Tremelling's name—to John's (and her own) relief—did not appear in any report of the court's proceedings; and, at last, when the inquest and funeral were over, he insisted that Janet should shut up her house in Alvaston, take John home to Sedgebury, and keep him company there for a couple of months. And Janet, for her part, needed little persuasion.

For five days of purgatory in all, John Bradley remained at Alvaston: the longest period of absence he had ever been granted since he first started practice in Sedgebury. He had no wish to return, no desire to start work again. The world lay dark under the shadow of death. His own life, it seemed to him, had neither purpose nor meaning, and he could not persuade himself that the lives of others mattered much more. He was no longer his sturdy self but a

haggard changeling, null, mute, and too disinterested even to be cynical. In rare moments when the voice of reason surprisingly spoke, he found himself recalling his state of mind at the time of Clara's death. During those bitter days, also he remembered, he had told himself that his life was over, and later, miraculously, recovered both faith and hope. But then, at least, he had struggled, he had been young: in spite of himself, the animal will to live, far more potent in youth than in late middle-age, had asserted itself; and then, too, he had not been wholly alone—he still had had Matthew to cling to, and the even more powerful feeling that Matthew, equally bereft, was clinging to him. But now there was nothing—and nobody—he wanted to cling to. He was fifty years old—his father had actually died before he was fifty—within sight, if not within reach, of the term of his natural life. He had lived and loved and lost. He had had enough. He would have been happy to live no longer.

The only emotion, indeed, to which, in those ghastly days, he was in the least susceptible, was Pity—not any generalized compassion for mortal men, but a particular, aching tenderness for poor Janet, his partner in calamity. Martin Lacey had planned more cunningly than either of them knew when he decreed that she should accompany John to Sedgbury. Though his was the heavier loss, involving the principal interest in his life, Janet, too, suffered bitterly: Matthew had lived with her for more than two years; she had become

attached to him not only because his frailty aroused in her a protective, a quasi-maternal solicitude, but also because his company and his interests renewed (or gave her the illusion of renewing) the youth she had sacrificed to Jacob Medhurst. In the past John Bradley had always been rather frightened of Janet—her sharp tongue, her mocking smile, her dark quizzical eyes; yet disaster, as not infrequently happens, had smoothed away these asperities, reducing her face and even, it seemed, her nature, to the fundamentals which may be seen in people of the same blood, to a sort of least common denominator of their family characteristics. When she spoke there were moments in which he seemed to catch the tones and inflections of Clara's voice, passing lights of expression and gestures that reminded him even more poignantly of Matthew. She was no longer a formidable stranger but oddly familiar. She was, after all, the only person in the world who not merely understood but shared in his desolation. It was his obvious duty to do his best to help and console her, and the mere fact that this duty diverted his brooding mind from himself was a blessing far greater than he realized.

They drove down to the station together on Saturday morning in the car which Lacey had insisted on sending for them. When it came to the point, John Bradley was thankful in a way to turn his back on North Bromwich, which must be for him evermore a city of dreadful memory, yet hardly less apprehensive

of returning to Sedgebury, with its equally devastating reminders of past happiness. He knew he must be prepared to run the gauntlet of macabre curiosity, of lame explanations and distressing condolences. Janet saw he was all on edge and adapted herself to his mood, assuming an air of matter-of-fact composure and an interest in unimportant trifles that was too sedulous to be genuine. She guessed, with the quick intuition of sympathy, that he was dreading the moment when he should find himself faced by some talkative, tactless acquaintance who knew what had happened, and took pains to see that they had a compartment to themselves.

For a while they were mercifully alone and travelled in silence; but at Winsworth station a third passenger blundered in breathlessly as the train restarted. He was a thick-set man, with a purple face and a bristling red moustache. John put him down immediately as a small commercial traveller. When he had stowed his bag of samples away on the rack and regained his breath, he stuck on a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles and unfolded a newspaper, the contents of which were apparently so exciting that he found it impossible to keep them to himself, for no sooner had he read the headlines than he shook his head violently, put down his paper and invited John Bradley to share his emotion.

"This is an 'orrible business," he said. "My God, if it isn't 'orrible."

John Bradley felt forced to respond to the invitation.

"I don't know what you mean."

"What . . . you don't say you 'aven't 'eard? It was in all the papers last night. This business at Sedgebury."

"At Sedgebury?"

John's heart went cold. He had not even glanced at a paper since he came to North Bromwich. Was it possible, he asked himself, that some wretched journalist had slipped through Lacey's cordon, got hold of his tragedy and made a "story" of it? He repeated:

"At Sedgebury?"

The intruder surveyed him with mingled pity and contempt.

"No doubt you're a stranger, mister," he said, "but if you belonged to these parts—were a Black Country man, like—you'd know as this Sedgebury Main Colliery disaster was the worst thing that's happened for years."

"A disaster at the Sedgebury Main? What is it? Fire-damp?"

"Water, mister. Just water. There's no gas in them pits. What they must've done, they must've broke into one of them underground resservoyers; and in it come, millions of tons of it. More than thirty lives lost. Well, that isn't so many, not when you come to think of the number they employ under-

ground. These 'ere colliers, poor devils, they know their risks and they're paid to face 'em. But the pit's gone for good: that's the knock-out. From what the paper says here they'll never be likely to get the upper hand of it, and there's more money sunk in that pit than in any other concern in the whole blooming district. It isn't the chaps at the top of the show, your Hingstons and Hacketts and Willises, that are going to feel it. It's the small investor, chaps like you an' me and widders and orphans who've put their savings into it. Hundreds of thousands of pounds—and not a penny to come back! And the chaps that'll be out of work! Cor, there's more than a dozen concerns, big and small, that depend on the Sedgebury Main Colliery, mind you. Shut up the pits, and you shut up the lot. Unemployment all round. I'll tell you straight, mister, saving the lady's presence, that this is the biggest bloody knock-out the Black Country's ever had or ever will have. I've more than a hundred pounds that I've saved by the skin of my teeth, as you might say, put in it myself. And I'm only one of thousands . . . thousands. You take this paper and see for yourself."

John Bradley took the paper and read it. From the laconic official announcements it seemed there was no doubt that the Sedgebury Main was finished—and with it the vast superstructure of industry that Furnival's ambitions had erected: thirty lives (they could not be sure of the number yet) and more than half a million

of money drowned deep in the sullen waters that were under the earth! John Bradley read, but he could not feel. When Janet questioned him, he answered her dully: Yes, of course he knew the pit well; he had seen its beginnings and watched it grow to become the greatest, as well as the best-equipped, in the district; all Sedgebury depended on it; a large number of men who worked in it were his patients; probably some of these had been drowned. He was conscious, but not ashamed, of the callousness with which he answered her; yet he knew it was wrong that she, who knew nothing of Sedgebury or its people, should appear to be more shocked than himself who belonged to the place and lived among them. .

"What an awful thing," she said. "I can't bear to think of it, John. All those poor men swept away and drowned in the dark, so helplessly!"

"Yes, it's an awful thing," he agreed. But to him it was not really awful. He had consorted too closely with death of late to be awed by the thought of it, even on this monstrous scale.

"Had you any money in it, John?" Janet asked.

He stared at her. Up till that moment he had not grasped the implications of the disaster as they affected himself. It came to him suddenly that he was a ruined man; and the thought of this moved him even less deeply than that of the poor, sodden bodies of the men he had known and the desolation of those to whom they had been dear. It was strange to think that now,

for the first time in his life, the possession or loss of money meant nothing to him; that the savings he had scraped together so painfully had become worthless even before they were lost: strange, and, oddly enough, heroic—seeing that this newly-proved independence of all things material only emphasized the proud magnitude of a loss which made all other losses trivial. He said:

“Yes, indeed, I’ve lost every penny I possess—between three and four thousand pounds.” And he laughed out loud.

The traveller gaped; his eyes goggled in his fat face. It was obvious to him that he had fallen in with a lunatic. He leant out of the carriage window and watched them disappear when they alighted at Mawne Road.

It was not, indeed, until they reached the outskirts of Sedgebury—saw the flag on the church-tower drooping at half-mast, the closed shops, lowered blinds, shuttered windows, the groups of shawled women and men in their Sunday clothes who stood talking at the street corners so earnestly that they did not even look up to see who was in the cab as it passed—that John Bradley realized the crushing weight of the blow that had fallen on the little town. The smokeless chimney-stacks of the colliery that rose from the crown of the ridge at the end of Crabb’s Lane and the motionless wheels on the top of the towering head-gear were symbols even more telling.

When he saw those monuments of desolation (they were to stand there, smokeless and motionless, for the rest of his life) he was suddenly stabbed and softened by pity and awe and remorse for his own insensibility. The power of feeling returned to him, and in this additional suffering he experienced a strange relief, for it told him that though his heart might be broken it was still alive. Though he could count no more on pleasure in living, there was still work to be done. As they approached the surgery he braced himself to the effort of pulling himself together and facing the empty future manfully.

Lacey's friend, the locum, whom he had expected to find there, was out, Emma told them. There were tears in her eyes and her plain face worked as she spoke. John saw he was "in for" the first of the spate of awkward, well-meaning condolences which he would have to bear with wherever he went during the next few days. He would have to find words of equally awkward thanks in which to answer them, and he knew the words that were wrung from his lips would sound lame and conventional however grateful he felt. Even so, human custom demanded that he should go through with it. Emma knew nothing more of Matthew's death than what she had read in the *Courier's* reports and what gossip had told her. She was eager (and naturally enough) for intimate details; and though he would far rather have said nothing, for the mere fact of recalling them agonized him, he knew

they could not be denied to this faithful soul who had made their lives and their interests her own since the day when Matthew ("her boy", as she called him) was born.

He told her as much as he could bear, and rather more, and was thankful when, in the midst of the harrowing recital, the surgery bell rang.

"I'll answer it for you," she said. "If it's a message, the young doctor can go to it when he comes back. You sit down and keep quiet," she added protectively. "You've no call to go bothering about such things for a while."

She went hurriedly to the door, forestalling his instinctive movement, but John Bradley followed close behind her: the chance of escaping from her (and from himself) was too fortunate to be missed. A young woman, her cheeks flushed with running, stood breathless at the door. When she saw John approach, her anxious face brightened.

"Oh, doctor," she panted, "yo've come back: they said you was away, and we thought as it might be the other one. It's my sister, young Mrs. Beazeley, what married old Abner Beazeley's Aaron—you know: Pump House Buildings. Poor Aaron was one of them that got caught in the pit; and Gladys, my sister that is, was expecting her first next month and the shock must have brought it on sudden. Oh, doctor, I'm that glad it's you and not the other one! Old Abner, he thinks the world of you."

Aaron Beazeley . . . Of course. That was surely the name of the stalwart young man who had walked with him to the surgery to fetch his father's medicine and had offered to pay for it on the night when he had discovered Matthew lurking in the dispensary. And now both he and Matthew were dead, while Aaron Beazeley's wife, this pale girl's sister, was brought to bed with his premature child. So, with alternations of death and birth, this bewildering life went on! For what reason? He could not say.

Yet, now that he found himself faced with a familiar emergency, the force of habit prevailed over these vain speculations and banished them. That part of John Bradley's self which was concerned with such matters responded at once to the stimulus. If he had ceased to exist as a sentient human being, he was still a doctor.

"All right, my lass," he said calmly, and even with a smile. "Don't frighten yourself too much. I'll be there before you get home." He turned to Emma:

"Fetch me the bag while I get my bicycle."

A moment later he was pedalling away towards Pump House Court, with the black bag slung on his handle-bar.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(1)

DR. BRADLEY heaved a deep sigh and stretched his legs. He thrust his bony ankles nearer to the hearth. He shrugged his thin shoulders and shivered. Not because he felt cold: there was plenty of heat left in the grate, though the embers were no longer red. The chill he felt was spiritual rather than bodily, and his shiver the kind of shiver that ran down one's spine when a goose (as Clara would have said) walked over one's grave. Perhaps he had allowed his mind to dwell upon painful memories rather too long this evening. However remote they might seem and however secure one might feel in one's immunity from them, there were times at which one's presumably well-regulated emotions popped up and caught one napping—almost literally napping, in this case, Dr. Bradley thought, for he found himself yawning and blinking and rubbing his eyes.

Well, well, for such chilly moods there was at least one proved remedy. He rose stiffly—after sitting still for so long it always took him a moment or two to get going—moved over to the sideboard and mixed himself a glass of whisky and water: rather a stronger dose

than usual; for when he held the bottle up to the light he saw that it was nearly empty and felt he might just as well finish all that was left.

In the earlier part of his life he had always been chary of spirits: the memory of his father's occasional "market peartness" and his mother's distress had given him a horror of them. But when one grew old and, as a consequence, prudent, when one's brittle arteries had lost their elasticity, when one's natural powers of recovery from fatigue were diminished, and sleep, their most potent restorer, came less easily, it was astonishing how composed and rested one felt after a single mild tot of whisky—how the glow that emanated from the beneficent drug not merely took the ache out of tired limbs and soothed taut nerves, but suffused itself gradually over all one's surroundings, until that which had seemed to be complicated turned out to be simple, and that which was threatening, harmless. Thus the poison dreaded in youth became the solace of old age. He never had more than one tot of whisky a day; but, during the last ten years—ever since he was turned sixty-five—Dr. Bradley had been in the habit of taking a night-cap at a quarter to twelve, fifteen minutes, exactly, before he went up to bed. Now, glass in hand (and the hand was remarkably steady) he returned to his chair, threw a handful of sticks and a couple of logs on the fire, and settled down to enjoy the blaze so long as it lasted. Indeed, as he sipped his drink, and the influence of the spirits

quicken his pulse, his features lost that brittle frosty look which, during the evening's drowsy meditation had made him appear an older and feebler man than he was. He leant forward in his chair with an air of attention, engrossed in the cheerful spurts of flame that rose from the crackling sticks. As he watched the larger wood catch, his cheeks faintly flushed with colour, and his bluish lips smiled, as though he were well content.

There had been one period in his life, Dr. Bradley reflected, when, but for that deeply-rooted prejudice against alcohol and an instinctive pride in his powers of self-control and his personal dignity, he might easily have consoled himself with the bottle—like his colleague, poor Macrae, who later died of it. During the first year after Matthew's death, he had certainly lost every reasonable incentive to go on living. Though he performed his work conscientiously, he had no heart in it; though he continued to be paid, quite inadequately, for his labours, the money he earned interested him no more than did the subtler and richer rewards of practice: his consciousness of having made an acute diagnosis, of a job well done, and the gratitude of his patients who, strange to say, still found life a precious gift and not a mockery. As he was single-handed, and likely to remain so, his time was fairly full and never his own. He toiled on and on in a fixed routine, mechanically, like a criminal climbing a treadmill or a squirrel circling a cage. The only

possible value of that work to himself lay in its virtue as an anodyne. And his mind was still too numb to be in need of that.

His salvation, as he realized later, had been Janet Medhurst's presence. When she returned with him to Sedgbury she had not planned to remain there for more than a couple of months: but Lacey, who continued to keep an eye on John and saw how near his haggard composure lay to a serious breakdown, prevailed on her to stay longer. She gave her admirable maids notice and let her house furnished for a year. She did this deliberately, in order to make it impossible for herself to go back on the sacrifice she had determined to make: the surrender of the first independence and comfort she had known in her spinsterly life. Not that John Bradley realized for a moment the extent of that sacrifice. The way in which he took it for granted was the only aspect of the situation which appealed to Miss Medhurst's wry sense of humour. She treated him less as a companion than as a child incapable of looking after himself or of managing his own business, but, fortunately, amenable to being managed himself.

Janet was not surprised that Matthew should have preferred her well-conducted house in Alvaston to that bachelor home. John Bradley himself neither knew nor cared what creature-comforts meant, and ever since Clara's death, conditions of life at the house at the corner of Crabb's Lane, surrendered to Emma's

management, had slipped towards her working-class standards in a decadence so gradual that he had not noticed it. Regarding herself as "one of the family", Emma considered that what was good enough for herself was good enough for her master, and more than good enough for an unwelcome visitor. Though no doubts could be cast on her devotion to John Bradley's interests and her loyalty to himself, she was now, in fact, a cross, a slovenly and (thanks to her failing sight and her refusal to wear spectacles) a rather dirty old woman, so fiercely jealous of Janet and so resentful of having her work "overlooked" as to be entirely unscrupulous in the weapons she used against her.

John Bradley knew nothing whatever of this domestic warfare. In his presence Emma was always entirely respectful. Much as she hated Janet's presence, and determined as she was to make her position intolerable, she was too fond of her master to do anything that might distress him; but as soon as his back was turned the old woman became a devil, her methods varying between sullen, mulish obstructionism and a lively guerrilla of nicely-calculated pin-pricks. At first Janet found the situation mildly amusing. She knew the strength of her own position, and without the diversion of countering Emma's obstructions her self-imposed exile at Sedgebury would have been intolerably dull. After a while, however, the old servant's maliciousness passed beyond a joke. She let it be known in the village that, according to what she

thought, Janet Medhurst had been primarily responsible for Matthew's death. It was she, Emma darkly suggested, who had deliberately and devilishly separated father and son, luring Matthew away from his home and corrupting him with her loose North Bromwich ways. And why had she done this? The reason was plain as a pikestaff. It also explained why, as soon as Matthew was dead, she had shut up her house and established herself at Sedgebury. The old cigarette-smoking bizzom was after the doctor—that's what she was! What was more, if the poor innocent didn't look out, she'd have him—and the first result of this dastardly plot would be that she, Emma Higgins, who had given up everything and worn her fingers to the bone for him, would find herself out on the street!

It did not take long for these tales to come back to John Bradley with picturesque variations and embellishments in the local taste. He was profoundly shocked by them—and most of all by the implication that Janet's continued presence in the house was regarded as not quite proper and that it was his duty as a respectable man to make an honest woman of her.

Though its intentions had not been so precise, Emma's latest manoeuvre actually attained her ends. These whispers, the source of which he did not guess, had the effect of falsifying John Bradley's relations with Janet which, hitherto, had been wholly natural and unselfconscious. They not merely embarrassed

him but troubled his conscience. Had he the right, he asked himself, to compromise Janet's good name by letting her stay on at Sedgbury in these equivocal circumstances? His immediate reaction was anger at the idea that the character of their relationship should even be questioned; but small towns are censorious, and the fact remained that he was a professional man and that the position of a doctor's housekeeper (like that of Cæsar's wife) should be above censure. Perhaps, after all, by its own standards, Sedgbury was right. Perhaps it was his duty to marry Janet Medhurst. He did not want to marry her. He did not want to marry at all, and found it hard to believe that anyone—least of all a woman so self-contained and self-sufficient as Janet—would be pleased or even flattered by a proposal of marriage from such an empty husk of a man as himself. All he could offer her, at best, would be a marriage of convenience; and the idea of such an unromantic union offended him when he recalled the youthful raptures of his marriage with Clara and the astonishing renaissance of ardour which had transfigured his second, frustrated passion for Mary Sanders. Though he loved Janet Medhurst dearly, he was not in the least in love with her, nor she with him. If married love were the supreme experience he believed it to be, had he (or Janet, for that matter) the right to accept a relationship which could only be rightly described as second best? After all, it was only five years since Parliament had made

marriages with a deceased wife's sister legal, and many strict churchmen still considered their validity questionable. He was not a strict churchman, nor, so far as he knew, was Janet; but the mere fact that he considered the religious point of view was a sign of reluctance.

Even so, he might easily have allowed himself to be propelled in the way of least resistance towards which his respect for public opinion was urging him, had not Janet herself relieved him of responsibility by suddenly announcing her intention of returning to Alvaston. Whether the disquieting talk had reached her or no, he could not guess and was far too shy to inquire; nor did he suspect, as a less innocent man might possibly have done, that she was freeing herself from an uncomfortable situation which the pressure of Emma's petty malice had made intolerable. There was nothing to suggest either of these possibilities in the way she broached the subject. She said calmly, one evening:

"By the way, John, I've just had a letter from my solicitors. My tenants don't want to renew the lease of the house. What d'you think I should do about it?"

He was so thankful to see a way of escape from his doubts that he had difficulty in not appearing to be too eager.

"What d'you want to do, Janet?" he said.

"Well . . . I've been thinking it over. You mustn't imagine I feel I've outstayed my welcome . . ."

"You haven't, my dear."

She smiled: "Well, it's nice to know that, John. All the same, I do feel that I've—what do they call it?—that I've more or less 'served my purpose'."

"You've saved my life, if that's what you mean."

"We've saved each other's lives if it comes to that. At the time when I came here I don't think I could possibly have stayed on alone at Meadows Lane. It would have been far too painful. But now . . . well, I've been here over a year, though it doesn't seem nearly so long. Time's a wonderful thing, John: there's no denying it. We're both of us very different people from what we were then. We've managed, between us, to pull ourselves and each other together. We both have our lives to live. You've your work, and I . . . Well, whatever it may be, I think I'm ready to face it."

"If you decide to go, I shall miss you most terribly, Janet."

"And I shall miss you, of course. Even so, on the whole . . ."

Within a week she was gone. The day of her departure was a festival of triumph for Emma Higgins. When next he heard from Janet, she wrote from San Remo to say that she had sold her house and all its contents and proposed to rent a small apartment either there or at Bordighera. It was a delicious climate, she said; she was learning Italian, and the wistaria was a dream.

(II)

"Supposing, that night," Dr. Bradley reflected, "I had done what I very nearly did, and asked Janet to marry me? And if I had, would she have accepted me?"

On the whole, he thought (and hoped) probably not—though this did not imply that, at that period of his life, with his strong hair and beard just tinged with grey and the distinction of his features enhanced by lines of suffering, he had been unattractive to women. On the contrary, even a good many years later than this, he could remember—not exactly with pride, but with the pardonable vanity of old age—three instances of married women and one of a naughty little hussy of seventeen who had, almost literally, thrown themselves at him. In these days, by all accounts, doctors who numbered many women among their patients protected themselves from such assaults on their virtue by the presence of a uniformed nurse, in evidence or discreetly concealed—a practice which signified either that the level of morality had generally declined or that the chances offered by doctors to blackmailers were now more widely appreciated. In all probability, both. He had often of late been perturbed by the number of practitioners of varying degrees of eminence who had passed through the Divorce Court to the bar of the General Medical Council. He was

inclined to believe that in matters of that kind his own generation of doctors had generally been stricter than this—or, was it merely more cautious? He himself had certainly never forgotten Jacob Medhurst's precept: *Never look at a pretty woman patient more than you can help. If she's ill, there's bound to be something unpleasant about her to fix your mind on. If you can't find one, avoid her like the plague!* It had served him well.

And, after all, though, of course, it was barely possible that Janet had been waiting for him to ask her to marry him, he was glad he hadn't. If she had rejected him he would have felt himself rather a fool; if she had accepted him, life might have become much more difficult. The pace of two minds in double harness (there was hardly a question of bodies at their time of life) should be fairly well matched—and hers had always moved a little too fast for him to be certain when she was serious and when she was not. In addition to which—as a matter of habit rather than of inclination—by the time when that question arose he had become more or less confirmed in bachelor ways to which, much more easily as a wife than as a guest, she might reasonably have objected. Emma Higgins knew those “ways” and had to accept them whether she objected or no.

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But he did miss Janet. Though there had never

been any real intimacy between them save in their common grief, her departure left an uncomfortable void in his life which, for a while, had disorientated him. It had been lucky for him that by the time when she decided it would be better for her to go, John Bradley had more or less recovered his equanimity: though he continued to look upon himself as a broken man and was convinced that he would never be whole again, he was beginning to fashion for himself a new kind of life—on a different plane from that which had been shattered by Matthew's catastrophe, but, none the less, surprisingly liveable.

If the acuteness of his personal affections (and even of his dislikes) were diminished, his new detachment enabled him to concern himself with public affairs in which his position as the senior professional man in Sedgebury entitled him to take part. He had neither much liking nor capacity for such novel activities; yet the fact that a large number of people in Sedgebury had begun to treat him as a person of some importance and that the Lord-Lieutenant had set an official seal on his respectability by inviting him to become a magistrate was, to say the least, flattering. It was pleasant, too, to think that all these modest compliments had come to him of themselves, without his having sought for them. They were, in fact, nothing more than the honours that naturally accrue to a man of middle age and acknowledged probity; but John Bradley's opinion of himself had always been so

modest that they took him by surprise. He couldn't help feeling that this recognition was less a compliment to his own humble self than a tactful expression of public sympathy towards a man whom life had used hardly. Looking back on this period, he was inclined to think he had been a trifle vain. He had certainly wished that one or two of his boyhood's companions in Lesswardine could see him, on Friday mornings, taking his seat on the bench.

What pleased him most of all was the change in his relationship with his medical colleagues. The destruction of the Sedgebury Main had dislocated the whole economic life of Sedgebury. The colliery itself had closed down and would never reopen, and most of its dependent ventures were in the same case. More than half the recent additions to the population of Sedgebury, the floating labour that had drifted in to share in Furnival's industrial carnival, were now out of work, marooned helplessly, as it were, amid the invading waters. A great part of the local tradesmen had lost their savings, and those who had joined in the reckless scramble for custom and given credit were deeply in debt. There was no money in Sedgebury; and, when money runs short, the last bills likely to be paid are always the doctors'.

It was this sense of a common emergency rather than any change of heart or access of brotherly love that now drew the rival doctors of Sedgebury together, persuading them to sink their differences and suspend

their vendettas in an attempt to weather the storm. Boyle and Macrae, as Medical Officers of the Colliery Club, felt the draught more keenly than the rest; for most of the members of Furnival's pet creation had worked in the flooded pit or about it and were now unemployed. The new club itself, for lack of accumulated reserves, was on the edge of bankruptcy; and the older friendly societies, whose stability was based on contributions drawn from the whole of industrial England, again became fashionable. More than two hundred old members who had been lured away from John Bradley's clubs—the Oddfellows, Buffaloes, Foresters and the rest of them—repented of their bad bargain and returned, rather shamefacedly, to their old allegiance. Once more John Bradley's club-practice was by far the largest in Sedgebury.

Boyle and Macrae swallowed this bitter medicine philosophically. Luck had swung the pendulum and given back their rival his old predominance. Now they could not even claim the Cottage Hospital as their preserve. Since Furnival's departure (he had shaken the gritty dust of the Sedgebury ridge from his shoes and retired to sulk at Cold Harbour) the Sedgebury Main Company's subsidy had been withdrawn from it, and their influence over the managing committee had waned. They could no longer presume to ride the high horse over the Senior Surgeon; and since now they depended, to a certain extent, on his leavings, they found it just as well to be on friendly terms with

him, and even—on carefully selected occasions—con-
descended to call him in as a “second opinion” in the
hope that he might be induced to return the compli-
ment.

John Bradley took this change of attitude for what
it was worth. It was grimly ironical, he felt, that, at
this time, when he had nothing particular to live for,
a turn of fortune should smother him with useless
favours. He did not believe in Boyle’s or Macrae’s
benevolence; and, as things turned out, he found he
had little reason to do so, for, by the end of the year,
the armistice had been broken and the battle re-joined
with an even more bitter intensity.

The occasion for this was Lloyd George’s Invalidity
and Unemployment Insurance Bill. John Bradley had
rarely troubled his head about politics. Many conten-
tious bills had been brought into Parliament and
wrangled over and passed or rejected without any-
body in Sedgebury being either the worse or the better
for them. Yet the Chancellor’s last social reform, the
Old Age Pension Act, had seemed to him a beneficent
measure which gave dignity and security to men who
had worked all their lives and freed their old age
from the dread of being forsaken or counted an in-
cubus; and his new Insurance Bill was only another
step in the same direction. John Bradley had always
been inclined to see life through the eyes of the class
in which he had been born and with which, as a doctor,
he had been most closely in touch; if he had been

forced to profess a political creed, he would probably have called himself Liberal, and this Liberal Bill, as he read of it in the newspapers, appeared to him wise and timely—for surely, in a well-organized state, every man who worked for his living should have the right to security and adequate medical care in times of sickness?

The old Friendly Societies, whose appointments he held, already provided both. But membership of these was voluntary. A large number of workmen in Sedgebury were still uninsured. When they fell sick they called in a doctor, and the doctor could not refuse. If the patient were honest, he might possibly pay for his treatment when he went back to work and began to earn wages again; but some, though honest enough, dragged the trail of unpaid debts incurred in sickness behind them for the rest of their lives, and others, less honest, had never had the least intention of paying. During his twenty-five years of practice, John Bradley had written off bad debts that totalled more than the savings he had lost in the Sedgebury Main.

And not all of the Friendly Societies were equally fair to their members, or even solvent. Some, such as Furnival's late unlamented Colliery Club, had dissolved after a few years of life without a dividend: he could remember another which had held its meetings at the "Powys Arms" and had been wrecked by the defalcations of a fraudulent secretary. It seemed to him more reasonable, therefore, that institutions

which played so important a part in working-class economy should be regulated and made responsible to their members: that their solvency and efficiency should be guaranteed by the State. Nor did it appear to him unjust that employers, who could only benefit by universal insurance, should pay their share of its cost. The Bill seemed to him a good Bill: it made for content and security. But first Parliament, and then the country, took fright at it.

The big employers, the Hingstons and Hacketts and Willises, had been up in arms from the first. It was monstrous, they said, that industry, already threatened by rising wages and heavily taxed, should be forced by law to concern itself in its workmen's private lives, to encourage the idleness of malingerers who would "go sick" on the flimsiest excuses, and to subsidize carelessness. The Hingstons and Hacketts and Willises already knew this fellow Lloyd George. It was he who had talked raving, revolutionary nonsense at Billingsgate, forced through the "People's Budget", and challenged the House of Lords—to which, as industrial millionaires, they expected ultimately to belong. Every thing that this pettifogging Welsh attorney did was suspect, and hid, without doubt, some deeper design against their purses and privilege. The thin end of the wedge!

The wives of the Hingstons and Hacketts and Willises took their turn next. This abominable Bill was actually planned to include domestic servants, a

pampered class, already inclined to be uppish. If maids were going to be paid for falling sick, good-bye to the last remaining shreds of domestic discipline! And these stamps . . . Incredible though it might seem, this degrading measure provided that stamps should be fixed every week to each servant's card! There was a full-dress meeting of protest which crowded the Albert Hall, at which thousands of "Society Ladies" shivered beneath their sables and ermines, while Mr. Belloc, the author, denounced the "infernal impudence" of a Government which expected "the better classes" to collect its taxes for nothing; and at Dulston, Lady Hingston, not to be outdone, appeared on the stage of the local theatre, glittering with diamonds, to declare that never so long as breath remained in her body would she (or Sir Joseph, for that matter) demean herself by licking one single stamp, and to urge her fellow-women of the Black Country to go to prison rather than submit to such a humiliation.

Lady Hingston's outburst, John Bradley thought, was rather a joke; but the odd thing about this campaign of hatred and intimidation against the Insurance Bill, was the fact that those classes of people who appeared to have everything to gain and nothing to lose by it joined in the attack. The opposition included officials of his own Friendly Societies. The secretary of the local Foresters, for instance, produced a resolution by the council of his Ancient Order pro-

testing against the right of the Government to interfere in their methods of administering medical benefits.

"They might have put it clearer, doctor," he said, "but I know what that means. It means that I'm going to have some bosted inspector coming down and taking me off my work and poking his head into my books. And suppose I'm a penny out? What'll happen then? An inquiry: that's what'll happen. And who's going to pay for it? Why can't the interfering beggars leave us alone? Call this a free country!"

"If your books are all right, you'll have no trouble," John said, "and club secretaries who keep their books badly, or welsh with the funds, like that chap at the 'Powys Arms', will soon be found out. I can see nothing wrong with that."

"That's all very well," the secretary said, "but what about this? As I read it, it seems as if every man who's employed has got to join this here scheme. That's right, isn't it? Well, I could give you the names of twenty fellows in Sedgebury this moment what I wouldn't have on my books on no account: chaps that make a point of going 'on the box' for a month at a time if they've so much as an aching finger. Give me half a dozen of them and my branch would soon be bust. Our funds wouldn't stand it."

"The Bill covers cases of that kind," John told him. "Any man the Friendly Societies refuse to accept will be entitled to insurance through the Post Office. Even if you get a bad bargain yourself, you'll have no cause

to worry. The reserves and resources of all the Friendly Societies will be pooled."

"Yo' mean that us Foresters'll have to pay for them Oddfellows? That's just what I knew it was. It's our funds the beggars are after. The clubs that look after their money proper are going to be made to pay for them that don't. Insurance Bill. . . . I call it bloody robbery!"

And, stranger still, the workmen themselves were beginning to stir uneasily. The propaganda of the great ironmasters had had its effect. Hardly a patient entered John Bradley's surgery without questions to ask or opinions to offer on the new Insurance Bill.

"I do' reckon to know much about this 'ere nine-pence-for-fourpence, gaffer. Sounds like getting summat for naught, and I wunna believe in that afore I sees it. Some says one thing and some another, but it looks like the masters have got a finger in this pie the same as in most, seeing that they be going to have the right, so I hear, to dock a chap's wages."

"The employers will be forced to pay half your weekly contribution," John Bradley explained. "They pay twopence themselves and twopence more which they keep back from your wages."

"And what right have they to keep back money I've earned?"

"You come out of it rather well, as a matter of fact. From your point of view there's no change. Haven't you always paid in twopence a week to your club?"

"Ah, of course I have, regular. But what I paid in, mind, I paid of my own free will. That's a different thing from having it docked off what a chap's earned."

Even the more intelligent among his working-class patients expressed the same doubts and dislikes. A particular favourite of his, a trades union official named Jim Hodgetts, the first child he had brought into the world at Sedgebury, was as bitterly prejudiced against the Bill as Sir Joseph Hingston himself. John Bradley did his best to make him see reason.

"Can't you realize, Jim," he said, "that this is one of the great social reforms for which we've been waiting—an even bigger thing than the Old Age Pensions Act? It seems odd to me that a Labour man like yourself should fight against it. If I didn't know what a sensible chap you are, I should say you were jealous of the Liberals getting in first."

Hodgetts smiled and shook his head. "No, no, it bain't that, gaffer. All the best men we've got—Snowden, Jowett, Will Thorne and Lansbury—feel just the same. What we say is: The Bill don't go far enough. We know we've a right to Insurance; but we reckon as the masters who take all the profits should pay the lot, not half of it."

"You'd much better be contented with what you can get, Jim," John Bradley told him. "If the Bill's defeated you'll find yourselves just as you were. But

it's going through. You can take my word for it."

The Insurance Act came into force in the following July. It was only towards the end of that year that the third interested party, the Medical Profession, began to show its hand. That they, of all people, should talk of refusing to "work" the Act seemed to John Bradley completely fantastic, for they actually gained by it more than anyone else. In most districts the club doctor's average remuneration was four shillings a year per patient, while in Sedgebury, thanks to his rivals' undercutting, this figure had shrunk to three. The Insurance Act offered them double that sum, with the addition of special allowances for patients living at a distance and for the supply of drugs by practitioners who did their own dispensing. Now that the Bill was law, every doctor in contract-practice might look forward to having his income from club patients doubled. But already the British Medical Association, to which John Bradley subscribed—more for the sake of its excellent Journal than for any belief in its importance as a representative body—was sending out agonized circulars to its members. John put every one of these into his waste-paper-basket. He had already formed his own judgment of the case on its merits, and was not going to be moved by emotional appeals to the sentiment of medical solidarity which, in his own experience, had not been a notable characteristic of the profession.

The attitude of the Association was so contradictory

to its obvious interests that he suspected its motives. He believed, in fact, that the whole agitation was political. Though doctors, as a rule, had no time to spare for politics and were probably among the least politically-minded members of the community, the colour of the profession as a whole (and particularly that of the men with big names who controlled the B.M.A.) was markedly Conservative. The opponents of the Bill realized this as well as he did and were doing their best to exploit it. They knew perfectly well that the doctors held the key to the situation; without their collaboration the Act could not be worked. They were stampeding this lazy-minded profession as easily as they had flattered the indignant ladies who refused to lick stamps. He himself was determined not to be moved by the shrieks of the half-penny Press, the British Medical Association or anything else. When invitations to meetings of protest reached him, he took no notice of them. The fact that his colleagues were blind enough to allow themselves to be used as pawns in a political game merely hardened his native obstinacy.

This attitude gave Boyle and Macrae the opportunity for which they had been waiting. So long as sympathy for him in his misfortunes had made John a popular figure in Sedgebury, it had hardly been worth their while to attack him; but now that he had identified himself, even though not very actively, with a cause that was generally unpopular with his colleagues,

they made hay while the sun shone. The partners in the other practice—the easy-going, elderly Wills and Altrincham-Harris, who felt it his duty to live up to his hyphen by showing himself a true-blue Conservative—fell in with Boyle and Macrac. It was not merely unwise, they all suggested, but hardly gentlemanly, for members of professional classes not to fall in with their fellows. Only one other doctor in the district, young Dakers of Wednesford, had adopted this anti-social attitude. It was permissible to label them “blacklegs” and treat them as pariahs. At a meeting of the local branch of the British Medical Association in Dulston, at which Boyle and Craig of Wednesford took the lead, it was decided to invite them both to make their position clear to an assembly of their injured colleagues. John Bradley declined the invitation and resigned from the B.M.A.—a body whose influence could not properly, he took trouble to explain, be used as an instrument of party politics.

At their next meeting Boyle, whose undoubted ability had brought him into some prominence, was instructed to interview John Bradley on behalf of the committee and do what he could to persuade him to fall into line. Boyle relished the job. This was quite like old times. He was spoiling for another fight; and now, with his colleagues behind him, he felt he had the whip-hand. For the first time in his life he called at John Bradley’s surgery.

“I’ve just dropped in to talk about this Insurance

Act," he began. "There appears to be some misunderstanding as to your position."

"Misunderstanding?" John Bradley laughed. "I shouldn't have thought that possible. I've made my position quite clear. I'm in favour of the Act. I'm prepared to work it."

"But supposing the rest of us are not? In that case the position of a medical man who hasn't stood by his colleagues may be rather unpleasant."

"You mean, you and your friends may boycott me?"

"We'd much rather not."

"Let's get this quite clear to begin with, Boyle. Who, exactly, are *'we'*? Macrae and yourself? Or are you speaking for Wills and Altrincham-Harris as well?"

"As a matter of fact, I'm speaking," Boyle said impressively, "as a member of the executive committee of the South Staffordshire branch of the B.M.A."

"In that case I know where I am. What you say doesn't concern me. I'm no longer a member."

"That's what we regret and dislike, Bradley. You've been a member of the branch for more than twenty years, and the moment the question of pulling together arises, you . . . well, you let us all down. To put it more bluntly, you're going to rat on us. Not that it matters greatly to us. Apart from that fellow Dakers at Wednesford, you're the only man in the district who hasn't had the decency to stand by his

colleagues. We've no intention of accepting the Government's terms, and they can't work the scheme without us. You'll look rather queer on the losing side in a minority of two."

"That's one thing I'm afraid you can't understand, Boyle, and never will. I've nothing I mind losing in the least—except my own soul. I'm not going to lose that to please you or anybody."

"That sounds all very fine and large and heroic, no doubt," Boyle said, with a sneer, "but it won't wash with us. You know perfectly well that, as things are, you've got practically all the contract-practice in Sedgbury, and you think you're going to keep it. But don't be too sure about that. Don't forget that the scheme gives each patient a free choice of doctor. You needn't think that all your club patients are satisfied with you. I happen to know a good many who aren't, and who come to me privately complaining that you've too many clubs already and that they can't get proper attention!"

"Well, in that case you're welcome to them, that's all. So far as I can remember, I've had no complaints, and if members had complained to their club secretaries I should certainly have heard of it."

"I don't think you take my point, Bradley. What I mean to suggest is this: You imagine, because you have all the clubs in Sedgbury, that when medical benefits under the Act come in on the first of January, all your patients will come over to you *en bloc*. From

what I know, I'm inclined to think that the rest of us stand to gain and you stand to lose a good deal more than you think."

"Then what, in the name of heaven, are you complaining of?"

"We're fighting for a principle."

"A *principle*? You? Well, really, my dear Boyle . . . !" John Bradley laughed out loud.

Boyle flushed but controlled himself.

"I don't think I need say any more. The whole of the medical profession is solid in this business. If you choose to accept the Government's terms you may find it awkward. If you get into difficulties or need help, not one of the rest of us will lift a finger to help you. If you want an anæsthetic given, you can give it yourself. It'll be your funeral—or your patient's."

"So this noble, humane profession of which we're so proud is going on strike? The public will appreciate that."

"The public has never had much use for blacklegs."

"Well, well. We shall see."

John Bradley went on his way. The strength of the intimidation that had been used could be judged from the fact that even old Wills, a friend of twenty years' standing, refused to return his salute when they met in the High Street. The opposition Press became full of excited jubilation: the doctors were standing firm; the Act was as good as dead; the little Welshman was beaten! With a week to go, it was announced that the

Chancellor was prepared to receive a deputation from the B.M.A. Boyle stopped John at the Cottage Hospital door. He was over the moon with triumphant delight. The battle was won; the yellow streak, so long suspected, had shown itself; Lloyd George was climbing down.

"We shall probably form a new medical service of our own," he said. "If we do, one thing is quite certain. *You* won't be in it."

But Lloyd George was not climbing down. At the critical meeting he announced that the Government intended to go through with the Act. It would come into force, as arranged, on New Year's Day, and a skeleton service of over two thousand properly qualified medical men—he was prepared to give all the particulars—had volunteered to work it.

Was it only a gigantic bluff? Was it possible that there could be so many traitors among them? Their wit could not fathom the subtlety of this charmer who spoke such hard things with a voice of honey. His blue eyes were inscrutable, now hard as steel, now lively with faint amusement. They returned to their delegate meeting apprehensive and bewildered. There was no more time to be lost in debate; this was the moment for a decision. Their enemy—though who could trust him?—appeared to be in a generous mood. As things stood, he could surely afford to be generous. They went back to Downing Street and capitulated.

When the lists of doctors prepared to serve on the

panel in Sedgebury was published, Boyle's name, in alphabetical order, appeared at the head of it. Macrae and he made up for lost time by canvassing for "insurance patients" as hard as they could; but in matters of this kind the people of Sedgebury were strangely loyal. Out of rather more than four thousand insurable persons of both sexes, no less than half brought their cards to John Bradley's surgery for him to sign. Boyle and Macrae secured no more than a thousand between them.

(III)

It had been, indeed, a famous victory. Even now, looking back on it, John Bradley remembered its flavour of triumph with some satisfaction. It proved one thing of which, in fact, he need never have been in doubt: that, however grave his professional deficiencies might be, the people of Sedgebury—the new generation as well as the old—had learnt to trust him, and finally removed from his mind an idea which, ever since Matthew's death, had lurked in the back of it—that he might possibly be happier if he sold his practice and retired to some place less full of poignant memories.

This generous and practical expression of his own people's confidence put that vague plan out of the question. It was a matter of personal honour, he felt, to

accept the responsibility his patients had given him and stand by them. He resigned himself gratefully to spending the rest of his working life at Sedgebury among folk who respected and loved him.

Though the size of his "panel" (as people now loosely called it) was flattering, it had its disadvantages. It would not be easy, he knew, to deal conscientiously with two thousand "insurance patients" single-handed. For a time he toyed with the ideas of employing an assistant or taking a partner, but finally abandoned both. He was too much of an individualist, too deeply sunk in his groove to work easily in double harness, and the thought of delegating a responsibility so personal offended him, even though he knew he could well afford it. He was not afraid of work. Indeed, of late, he had become so accustomed to the grinding routine that he had lost all interests outside of it and felt oddly restless and disorientated when periods of seasonal slackness left him at a loose end. During the two years that followed the inception of the Insurance Act, when the newly-insured felt it almost a duty to avail themselves of its benefits on the flimsiest of excuses, he found himself working harder than at any previous time in his life—not excluding his period of mechanical drudgery at Boulton Crescent.

On the whole, he felt none the worse for it. The new pressure compelled him to reorganize his practice on more orderly lines and with a greater regard to

economy of time and energy. It prepared and fitted him, in fact, for the far greater stresses he was to bear at the end of the following year when the Great War began.

He was never called upon to serve with the Forces, though he sent in his name as a volunteer in nineteen-fourteen. In those early days the War Office had no use for men in the middle fifties, and doctors practising in industrial districts with big "panel" practices were generally regarded as being engaged in "work of national importance"; though in the middle of the war's second year, when conscription came in, Boyle, and Altrincham-Harris and later Macrae (none of whom had volunteered) were quickly put into khaki, leaving Wills, now beginning to feel his age, and John Bradley to deal with all the medical needs of Sedgebury.

Apart from the questionable glory which invested his colleagues when they returned from the base hospitals where all three (with the exception of Boyle) were stationed, John doubted if he had missed much by being earmarked for civil practice. There were times, indeed, when he felt a little envious of these most unmilitary bravos who watched him cycling past in his old frock-coat while they swaggered through Sedgebury in uniform. And yet, after all, he knew he was "doing his bit" as effectively as they, attending their patients day and night as well as his own and—what seemed less reasonable—handing over to them

every penny he received for these services. Though he did not grudge them the money he earned for them while they led the only intermittently strenuous life of medical officers in military hospitals far removed from all threat of danger, where their duties allowed them to play golf nearly every day of the week, he did feel that Macrae and Altrincham-Harris might have been rather more grateful for what he did and a little less contemptuous of his civilian status.

During the four long years of war, he and Wills, between them, fulfilled all the medical demands of the Sedgebury district which, in peace-time, had absorbed the energies of five men, and, most of the time, old Wills was a "passenger"—particularly after the middle of nineteen-sixteen, when his only son was killed on the Somme and he completely lost his powers of concentration.

(Supposing Matthew had lived, John Bradley asked himself—he was able to think of Matthew less painfully now—would he not, in all probability, have been involved in the same brutal holocaust? Was there any distinction to be made between death in the glory of battle and that other inglorious death in the ward of Prince's? For himself he could see no great difference. Death was death, and there was an end of it—though he could not grudge poor old doddering Wills the aura of reflected heroism which appeared to console him.)

It was fortunate for himself—and, indeed, for Sedgebury—that John Bradley's physical powers

proved equal to these more than human labours. In spite of the constant drain of the war, the population of the little town had actually increased to the level it had reached when the Sedgebury Main was opened. Furnival's subsidiary factories, which had stood empty since the Colliery Company's failure, were eagerly snapped up by munition-makers. From all over the district men and women flocked into these "sheltered" trades. The influx of strangers with high wages to spend gave the place an air of bustling gaiety, a reckless cheerfulness that John Bradley found difficult to reconcile with the war's realities: a casual observer would have said that the Black Country was enjoying itself. He was even more deeply shocked, as a genuine Victorian if not as a prude, by the increase of sexual promiscuity in Sedgebury, which in spite of being industrialized had kept, until then, a good deal of its rural innocence. No doubt under the badly-balanced conditions of war-time, in which the more virile part of the male population had been arbitrarily removed, it was natural that girls who otherwise would have been "courting" and securing husbands should make the most of their chances when the boys came home on leave. It was, perhaps, the very fierceness of this competition together with a pervasive sense of life's brevity and precariousness that made this young generation so brazen in the satisfaction of its desires—these, and a cause which, though unguessed, was even more potent and elemental: Nature's biological need to make good

the mass of human material destroyed on the Western Front. It was a process, he realized, that had its parallels in human pathology, this automatic activity of proliferating cells; but the figure that came to John Bradley's mind when he saw it was drawn not from medicine but from his boyhood's memories of *Lesswardine*—the death-dance of brittle ephemerids gaily spinning to destruction or swept in clouds on the wind over the still pools of Teme.

Not that he had much time for the elaboration of similes. His mind was more concerned with the immediate results of this carnival, which included the birth of a large number of war-babies, over which it was permissible for people to sentimentalize, and a by no means sentimental increase of venereal disease which had never before been prevalent in *Sedgebury*. He was living, it seemed to him, in a world which in its pursuit of excitement and pleasure had gone quite mad, and knew that he could do nothing to remove the causes, even though he might palliate the results. What, in rare moments of brooding leisure, gave him deeper concern, was his dread of the effects these artificial conditions must have not on the war-generation itself, a large part of which was doomed in any case, but on the new generation begotten in an atmosphere of excitement by parents whose nerves and emotions were on edge—the children of the war, brought forth casually into a world devoid of quietude with an hereditary dower of instability, unsuitably fed,

undernourished, condemned to grow up in the society of their war-worn elders, the weary and disillusioned who knew neither faith nor hope. He sometimes wondered if he would be spared (or condemned) to see these gloomy prognostications justified.

During the last year of the war, the trustees of the Sedgebury Main Colliery Company (in liquidation) handed over the Cottage Hospital, whose charter still gave them a limited control, to the military authorities, and a new weight was added to John Bradley's crushing burden of work. He accepted it gladly. For a long while, though he knew he was considered to be doing his duty in releasing Macrae and Altrincham-Harris to play golf and bridge at Tidworth, he had felt himself rather like a fragment of driftwood circling a backwater, humiliatingly detached from the main current of national effort. The status of Commandant, which the War Office gave him, restored his personal pride. Though no very heroic activities could be expected from a man in his fifty-ninth year, he no longer felt wholly "out of it".

There were not many beds available in the Cottage Hospital, and the soldiers they sent him were usually convalescents; but the mere fact that he was dealing at first hand with the wreckage of war as well as with the humdrum routine of general practice—that unending succession of stock ailments, minor casualties and midwifery cases amid which he moved with such

easy familiarity—had the effect of stimulating his professional curiosity and arousing a new interest in his work. He was not, after all, he discovered, too old to learn the new doctrines and methods of surgical technique which, developed in that fierce forcing-house, were, so far as he could see, the only compensation the War had given to suffering humanity.

But the greatest of all the benefits he received from this addition to his labours was the pleasure of working under the direction of Martin Lacey, who, after a period of war service and research in France, had been appointed Consulting Surgeon to the Midland Command and was available in any case of peculiar interest or difficulty. There were several of these at Sedgebury: men on whom Lacey himself had performed feats of brain-surgery of a daring and delicacy which had hardly been dreamt of before the appalling head injuries inflicted by shell fragments made such desperate remedies worth a trial. He had made friends in France with an American named Hervey Cushing who was working on the same bold lines, and had hopes, with him, that this new province of surgery, opened up, as it were, by high explosive, held forth promises of even greater developments in peace-time.

John Bradley was thrilled and inspired by the live flame that still burned within him so vividly. In moments of enthusiasm (and Lacey was always on fire) he felt that he need only close his eyes to imagine himself back in that icy orangery at Alvaston where,

as a raw hero-worshipper, he had listened to the same swift torrents of speech, had been transported by the same strong-winged flights of imagination. Yet, when he opened them again, he knew they were both of them very nearly old men, and that Lacey, whose life had been lived at a strepitant tempo with which he could never have attempted to keep pace, was years older, physically, than himself. Lacey's hair, though still abundant and tempestuous, had turned snow-white, and his eyes, of the old, dazzling azure, were deep-sunken now in a face whose ivory pallor enhanced its original distinction of feature. It was a tragic face, too, John thought, though the impression of sadness often vanished under the influence of the quick, remembered smile.

It was difficult to believe, indeed, that a vessel so fragile as that slight frame could safely contain such a high potential of nervous and physical energy. When sometimes, in rare moments, Lacey relaxed—when the azure flame was hidden and the mouth which had smiled so brilliantly a moment before was allowed to fall in its natural lines, his still face appeared to John Bradley to resemble a death-mask; he had never seen on a living man's features the stamp of such mortal fatigue. He was so moved by this sight that, assuming the privileges of an old friend, he suggested to Lacey that he owed it to his work as well as to himself to take things more easily.

"You look an ill man," he said.

"I am an ill man, my dear John," Lacey answered briskly: "You know that already."

And immediately, considering himself impersonally, as a "case," he was launched upon the exposition of a new—and perhaps fantastic—theory: how diseases whose havoc implied the destruction of living tissue—such as tubercle, cancer, or syphilis—released into the blood-stream, as products of disintegration, the most perfectly assimilable food from which could be drawn a continuous supply of superhuman energy.

"They live on themselves," he said. "Look at Napoleon, look at Stevenson, look at this Russian fellow Lenin! They don't live very long, but, my God, while they do live they're human tornadoes! Do you know what a supercharger is? No, of course not: you never had a mechanical mind, John. It's a new means of blowing a surplus of fuel into an engine. Napoleon Buonaparte was supercharged. So am I. But I'm fifty-eight—don't forget that—and he died of cancer at fifty-two."

John spoke of Ehrlich's discovery of salvarsan.

"Yes, yes, a superb achievement," Lacey agreed, "but a few years too late. Let's be glad it's removed most of the terrors of life from those who were lucky enough to meet those particular terrors after Ehrlich invented it. And, mind you, it's only a beginning. We're on a new trail. Now that we've found a non-toxic drug that can kill the spirochaete and the trypanosome, there's no reason on earth why the chemists

shouldn't find others, not necessarily arsenical, that will kill tubercle bacilli and cocci and every other damned germ that plays hell with our wretched bodies. That's a chink in the armour of death, my boy. The first—but by no means the last. May we live to see the others!"

He did not live to see them.

When, one evening a few weeks later, John Bradley rang up Lacey's Alvaston house from the Cottage Hospital to ask for a word of advice on one of his convalescents, the butler answered him with surprise.

"Mr. Lacey, sir? Mr. Lacey died yesterday afternoon," he said bluntly. "It's in all the papers this morning," he added in an aggrieved tone, and then abruptly rang off.

John borrowed the matron's *Courier*. Nobody had any time to do more in those days than glance at the monotonous war-time headlines. Even casualty-lists were no longer anxiously scrutinized. If a friend was killed, one usually heard of it long before his name appeared in them. Amid that gigantic destruction death had become a commonplace; and the death of a mere civilian was hardly worth mentioning. Yet, glancing down the front page, John Bradley found an announcement, and, in another part of the paper, an obituary notice that occupied less than a third of a column. He read the bald, stilted recitation of Lacey's history and academic achievements with growing anger. The writer, whoever he might be, was an

ignorant dullard. He wrote of Lacey as he might have written of some ordinary man who had spent a laborious, useful life as a hospital surgeon—not of the brilliant technician, the lively and passionate intelligence, the ardent, generous human being who had devoted every grain of his strength and tenderness to the alleviation of human misery and the research of truth. Was it possible, John Bradley thought, that a creature so rarely fashioned in body and mind, a man of such spiritual and mental integrity, such utter selflessness, could be consigned to the ultimate silence with such lame words?

“If I were a poet,” he thought, “I could have written an epic about him. And if Martin could have read it,” he thought again, “he would only have smiled at me.”

He handed the paper back to the matron in silence.

“Poor Mr. Lacey!” she said. “What a tragedy! He was a nice man, wasn’t he? Though, as I’ve often told sister, in spite of his cleverness and all that, you never really felt you’d got to the bottom of him. Intriguing, that’s what he was. We always felt it such a pity he was a bachelor.”

“He was a good man and a great surgeon,” John Bradley said:

Another epitaph . . .

The only feature of significance in the “obituary” was the intimation that Lacey had died of cerebral hæmorrhage. He had been stricken down in the

theatre at Prince's, John learnt later, after completing a brain operation, at the moment when he was removing his gloves, and had never recovered consciousness.

(IV)

Dr. Bradley took his last sip of whisky and water and put down the glass on the floor beside his chair.

Though he had loved and admired his friend this side of idolatry, the loss of Lacey had affected him with a much less personal emotion than his previous bereavements. When he came to think of it, he did not feel that any man could have lived a fuller, richer, more useful life, or died, with more merciful swiftness, the death he would have chosen. He did not mourn Lacey's death. To him it was as if, of a sudden, the sun had sunk behind clouds and light left the earth.

Of a certain the scene had lost something for him by that ruthless extinction; it was more soberly coloured now, and the lighting more dim; yet its features, as his eyes became accustomed to them, did not seem greatly changed. The change, if change there were, was rather in himself.

That was natural enough. Lacey and he, after all, had been very much of an age; and when a man reached sixty, as, if he lived, he would do in another twelve months, he needed no extraneous intimations of mortality—such as the passing of contemporaries

or of men whom he has looked upon as little older than himself—to warn him that the greater part of his own life had been lived. Ten years more—less than a third of the time he had spent in Sedgely—*Sedgebury*—and he would reach the allotted span of human life. The last four, the war years, had passed with the swiftness of a dream. Of late life had seemed to slip by at a bewildering pace, to be gathering speed—as the setting sun appears to fall more fast when it nears the horizon.

Though he did not “feel his age”, as the saying went, he was conscious, indeed, of a pleasant serenity, resembling that which makes sweet the hour before sunset. Though he was still capable of doing as long a day’s work as many younger men without any sensation of fatigue, he was beginning, almost unconsciously, to take things more easily: to lie collecting his thoughts for a while before he rose in the morning; not to worry or hurry inordinately when he found himself a few minutes late for “surgery”; to put on the carpet-slippers which Emma laid out to warm for him as soon as he came home; to walk upstairs—instead of running three steps at a time; to dismount from his bicycle when a stiff gradient was against him.

As for his efficiency as a doctor, he could say conscientiously that he had never felt in better trim. The return of the other *Sedgebury* men from the War had lightened his burden enormously, although Wills, who had never recovered from the blow of losing his son,

was now obviously failing, and Macrae, to Boyle's embarrassment, had started on his alcoholic career. Old Wills—as a matter of fact he was actually only five years his senior—appeared to him a pitiful sight. Was it possible he wondered, that he too, appeared decrepit to unprejudiced eyes? And if the pressure of work was approximately halved, John Bradley also felt he could claim that his power of dealing with it had been doubled during his thirty-three years in Sedgebury. He had become so expert now—not only in the ordering of his routine, but in recognizing the kind of cases that made up the ordinary run of general practice, that he could move through a long day's work with the conditioned reflexes of a man who can make his way unerringly in the dark down the staircase of his own home. All the experience of those years, laboriously acquired by exhaustive observation of physical signs and symptoms and checked a hundred times by the method of trial and error, was now at his service. He could distinguish between appearances which were significant and those which were not, and felt he knew more about most of his patients at a glance than, in early years, he would have managed to discover in a couple of days—this by virtue of a kind of sixth sense, a subconscious summary of the evidence of the other five, a clinical instinct which warned him or reassured him (as the case might be) of what he had to deal with.

This was not, as it seemed, a matter of inspired guess-

work, but rather the result of a variety of evidence which he had unconsciously acquired. His long intimacy with the people of Sedgebury had given him an insight into their complicated psychology: more than this—a knowledge of each family's characteristics. He knew how one strain of blood was gouty, another nervous, yet another lymphatic; how the flesh of one family suppurated easily, while that of another resisted septic infections. His acquaintance with them was so expert that he was almost able to forecast how their individual members would react to various kinds of disease. And, apart from this, he had other sources of useful knowledge. He had become not merely an authority on Sedgebury family history, but a repository of family secrets: some innocent enough, others shameful and even terrible. The majority of his patients had felt, at some time or other, the need of a confidant if not of a confessor. People came to John Bradley with their troubles rather than to the parsons, because, though his own reputation was irreproachable, he was wise and humane and never censorious of human frailty.

By degrees, and without any conscious seeking on his own part, he had attained a unique reputation, not only in Sedgebury itself, but in the neighbouring towns and villages. Sick folk—and particularly those of the older generations—demanded his advice less because he was considered a sound "opinion" than because he was known as a man of sober judgment and

character whose mind would never be swayed by a desire for professional notoriety or motives of personal gain. This position became even more firmly established a few years later, when Wills, his only serious competitor in that kind of prestige, sold his share in the rival practice and went into retirement, and, about the same time, that shrewd fellow Boyle, who had never quite settled down to general practice since his return from military service and was embarrassed by his partner's alcoholic proclivities, decided to set up in North Bromwich as a radiological specialist and master of all the new electrical "gadgets" whose use had become such a fashionable (and profitable) department of medicine since the War. When these two had departed, the only members of the old dispensation left in Sedgebury were Altrincham-Harris, whose social ambitions remained very much as they were; Macrae, always sinking to deeper levels of degradation; and John Bradley himself.

On the whole, Dr. Bradley reflected, this period of his middle sixties had been one of the happiest—partly because it was the most serene—of his working life. He had reached a stage at which he was aware of his own physical limitations. Though he was still young for his years, he had been forced to admit that he was growing old, and this admission, unwillingly as he made it at first, was, of itself, a relief. The competitive element had gone out of his life. He no

longer cherished ambitions, knowing well that he had performed as much as was in him. He had no more financial anxieties. His needs were few and his simple mode of living became even simpler. So long as he "kept his health" he knew he could earn as much as he spent, and even a little more. If life gave him little, it was no matter: he asked little of life.

True, the world in which he now found himself a curious survivor was very different from that he had formerly known. It was not the face of Sedgebury that had changed. Apart from a single white concrete Picture-Palace which had sprung up like an enormous mushroom thrusting aside the débris of three early-Georgian houses in the High Street, there had been no new building since the rash of red brick had broken out at the time of the Colliery Company's boom, and even that fiery disfiguration had been toned down by the smoke disgorged from the Black Country's chimneys during the war. So far as industrial activity went, the little town was hardly more lively than it had been when John Bradley first knew it. Mr. Furnival's lorries no longer went thundering down Crabb's Lane. Weeds and squitch grew thick round the skeletal headgear of Fatherless Bairn Colliery (as the Sedgebury Main had come to be called) and found a more precarious footing on the shaft-sinkers' spoil-heaps.

It was rather the spirit of this post-war Sedgebury which John Bradley, going on his rounds, found alien

and disconcerting. The place had shed much of its individuality, its people their insular sturdiness of outlook. Even their language had lost its autochthonous flavour. Their rugged Black Country accent, the vivid turns of speech and verbal inflexions, were all but gone, having gradually given place to the mimping "standard English" which reached their ears by way of the wireless aerials that stretched like the strings of a vast Æolian harp (with only one tune) from every cottage chimney-pot, and more than a trace of the standard American that boomed at them from the amplifiers of the Palladium Cinedrome. Their attitude towards life was different. It was based, Dr. Bradley felt, on a universal desire to get something for nothing—whether it were merely the finicking trash that was "given away" with provisions stocked by the "multiple shops" which had elbowed the old-fashioned grocers out of the High Street, the "presents" showered on collectors of coupons enclosed in packets of margarine or clipped from the daily Press, or the newspaper prizes offered by football-pools and newspaper "competitions".

This new—and to him incomprehensible—mode of life seemed no more than an extension (and confirmation) of Gresham's monetary Law on a spiritual plane: just as bad money invariably ousted good, so this new debased currency of speech, of ideals, of manners, appeared to be destined to prevail. The new generations in Sedgebury (there were two of them now)

apparently took the change in values for granted; but though, as a student of science, he was ready to accept the inevitable necessity of evolution, John Bradley could not admit that the turn it was taking now in human affairs could be permanent—say, rather a sorry and pitiful divagation into a blind alley from which, disillusioned, it would some day return. For he believed that right living and right thinking were the prime conditions of human happiness; and the folk of Sedgbury were not, to his mind, so happy as they had been. They were “thrilled to death” with excitement, maybe, but they were no longer gay. Theirs was a noisy, a garish gaiety that he could not understand. He was a quietist by nature, and too old, he was thankful to say, to make an effort to understand it.

No doubt people thought him old-fashioned. He did not regard the description as a discreditable stigma. He even felt it would be foolish as well as unnatural (no fool like an old fool!) to make any concession to the fashions of this mad new world. It was much easier as well as more dignified to persist in being himself, to withdraw from the heat and confusion of this crowd that ran this way and that in search of they knew not what—even the state of medical science reflected the age’s disorientation—and to go on with his work as long as he could, and then to retire, without any censoriousness or condescension, into the coolness of a spiritual solitude rich in memory.

Perhaps, in his anxiety to dissociate himself from the

spirit of the age and its material preoccupations, he rather overdid it. An old man may reasonably be allowed the privilege of a little vanity, and if he felt proud of being obstinately old-fashioned, why shouldn't he show it? Just as before, when he could have afforded to run a small car and save his legs, he had persisted in riding a bicycle, so now, when many of the humbler houses in Sedgebury were being wired for electric light, he refused to abandon his incandescent gas-lamps. His attitude towards clothes was of the same kind. He had never attached much importance to dress. Indeed, during his early married life, when Clara had been proud to let him squire her to church, his lack of the smartness to be expected of a professional man had actually distressed her. It was in deference to her that he had adopted, a little incongruously for Sedgebury, the costume worn in those days by North Bromwich consultants: a full-skirted frock-coat, cut high at the neck, with silk-corded revers, striped grey cashmere trousers, a waistcoat of rather daring brocade with a fob, and a tall felt hat.

After Clara's death he had continued to wear the same kind of clothes with a black neck-tie, in token of mourning, replacing the knot of Spitalfields silk, and had gone on wearing them ever since—not out of respect for her memory, but because he was too careless of such matters to think of making a change. When one of his old suits wore out (and the materials

supplied by his tailor in Dulston were so good that they usually lasted for many years) he merely ordered a new one of identical cut: he had no time to spare for new measurements or fittings; the old mode, with its ample pockets, suited him, and, in spite of Mr. Hodgetts' entreaties, he saw no reason why he should make a change. Later on, when Mr. Hodgetts, who understood his ways, went the way of all tailors, he had been chary of ordering any more clothes, for he felt that those he already possessed, the frayed-cuffs and trouser-ends darned and then cut shorter by Emma Higgins, would probably "last him his time". When he grew middle-aged, the eccentricity of his standardized costume had never occurred to him; but now that he was old and had begun to take rather a childish pride in being different from other men, he found in it an easy way of proclaiming that difference and, at the same time, pleasing himself.

Sedgebury folk, indeed, were so used to his odd appearance that they took no further heed of it. It was only when strangers came to the town and were startled by the apparition of this lanky, white-haired, grey-bearded old man laboriously propelling a safety-bicycle in a frock-coat more than forty years out of date, that they noticed anything out of the ordinary. Old John Bradley did not mind in the least being stared at. The people of Sedgebury—*his* people—understood him. If, in the presence of strangers they were forced to admit that his costume was a trifle

eccentric, a "character" (the more erudite went so far as to add the word "Dickensian"), he knew that, in secret, they were rather proud of him as an "institution" and loved him as a friend; and by this time he had reached a degree of wisdom when he felt he would rather be loved than respected—or even admired. In the end, it was only human relationships that counted.

One of these, and nearly the oldest, his association with Emma Higgins, who had kept house for him, with more fidelity than efficiency, ever since his wife's death, was shortly to be dissolved. The doctor's "girl" was now a crotchety old woman. Most of her joints were crippled by rheumatism, and a heart lesion of the same origin, neglected in girlhood, made her short of breath. It had become clear that if she did not retire from service it would soon be a question of John Bradley looking after her rather than of her looking after him.

"It's the stairs that finishes me," she said, "just them and the scrubbing. So long as I can stand still on my feet I'm champion; but once I get down on my knees I begin to wonder if I shall ever dare to get up again. What you want, by rights, now, is a strong clean young person to do the 'ouse justice, and I shouldn't have spoken if I hadn't got one in mind."

"I don't like to think of your leaving me after all these years," John Bradley told her. "We know one

another's ways: it would be a poor look out if we didn't. If I were certain that you would be comfortable . . ."

"Oh, don't bother your 'ead about me! I've a niece—a grand-niece that is—who'm ready to 'tend to me whenever I may say the word. Sarah Hackett's her name. Yo' know her as well as I do. Her'll look after me all right if it's only because of my savings."

So Emma packed her tin trunk and went, and the strong, clean young person came, and John Bradley hated her. She was a great deal cleaner, in fact, than Emma Higgins, whose rheumatism, during the last few years, had compelled her to let things slide; but she was a stranger, and John Bradley found it increasingly hard to accommodate himself to strangers, and she thought a good deal more (not unnaturally) of the young man who waited for her in Crabb's Lane, than of the old man inside.

Yet he "jogged along pretty well", as he told people. Apart from the stiffness in his nobbly fingers, he thanked God he was as well as could be expected. He was forced to give up a good deal of his work. He took on no new panel-patients, and warned those who lived far from the surgery that he could not attend them any longer: the young men, he said—though he did not entirely believe it—were far better doctors than he. And he booked no more midwifery cases. Except in a mortal emergency he preferred not to turn out at night. Still, he managed to go on attending most

of his older patients—who were steadily decreasing for the most natural of causes—up till the time of his accident.

This, the first physical disability in nearly fifty years that had ever prevented him carrying on with his duties, occurred in his seventy-first year. How it actually happened he could never precisely remember. In all probability his thoughts had been wandering at the time (as they had tended to wander lately) and the wing of a passing motor-car had touched his bicycle's handle-bar and sent him spinning in the gutter. There a party of men returning from work had found him. When he came to himself he was in the Cottage Hospital, and one of his younger colleagues had stitched up a gaping scalp-wound and another gash on the cheek.

They kept him in bed for three days and then, rather reluctantly (but he was wilful) allowed him to go home. Although he was badly shaken and bruised and stiff, he did not, at the time, feel much the worse for this violent adventure. He was pleased with himself when they told him how well, for a man of his age, he had stood the shock, but strongly resented the fact that he had been shaved while he was unconscious. He had worn a beard for so long that the loss of it made him feel oddly naked; but as people who saw him afterwards said he looked all the better for it, he bought an amusing toy, a safety-razor, and later

appeared in public with a clean-shaven chin and whiskers.

Oh yes, he was perfectly all right, he told inquirers brusquely. But he wasn't all right. There must have been slight concussion with, perhaps, an infinitesimal hæmorrhage from the cerebral membranes, which accounted, no doubt, for that blank in his memory and for the fact that when he went back to his work he was subject to other such lapses. For some time before this he had found himself becoming forgetful of names—even those of old patients and familiar drugs would sometimes escape him, while those of new people whom he met were no sooner spoken than gone from him. He had been very cunning about this, inventing an elaborate system of mnemonics to aid him, though the deuce of it was that the mnemonics often reminded him, most convincingly, of the wrong names. But after the accident it was not merely his memory for names that occasionally failed him, but his memory of recent events. Some days it was fairly good: on others provokingly bad. No doubt the tiresome defect would pass when he got back his general strength.

He did get back his strength; but it took him a very long time, and even when it had returned he was conscious of an effort in using it and of exhaustion when it had been spent. His bicycle, picked up after the accident, was nothing but a mass of twisted metal, so he brought the old tricycle out of the shed and had

new tyres fitted to it. He felt safer on three wheels than on two, though the effort of pedalling them was greater. After a hard day's work, he felt less and less inclined to go to sleep. His brain raced, like a motor-car engine running light, and his bones complained—the psalmist knew what he was talking about!

During all his life he had been at his best at the moment when he opened his eyes in the morning. Now he more often woke in the middle of the night and had to light a candle and read before he could get to sleep again; and the vitality which, of old, had rushed through his body on waking like a strong flood, was now sluggish in movement. He rarely felt at his best before afternoon; and when, as now, having finished his "surgery", he settled down by the fire after supper, he had hardly begun to concentrate on the newspaper—which, Lord knows, in these days, was sufficiently full of exciting alarms—than the print began to be blurred, the hands that were holding the paper relaxed and sank to his knees, and the rustle of the paper falling to the floor brought him back to himself with a start.

But indeed, more often than not, the news in the papers, in which he supposed it was the duty of an intelligent man to keep up his interest, appeared, paradoxically, more remote and less pertinent than those long excursions of backward-reaching memory in which an old mind was blessedly gifted to recall matters of greater importance to an individual life

than events which, in history, might be thought to have shaken the world: the rapture of love and its pride, the confidence of indomitable youth, the glory of high aspiration, and, added to these, innumerable little things—scents of flowers and colours of cloud, sounds of bird-song, beloved voices, running water—the sum of fugitive sensual impressions that had sharpened the flavour of life and, miraculously returning at will or even of their own accord, gave back their sweetness. There were dark moments in memory too; but even the remembered poignancy of these enhanced by their contrast of shadow the rich colour and texture of memory as a whole.

“Life is good,” Dr. Bradley thought to himself. “Yes . . . life is good . . .”

Dr. Bradley slept.

He awoke, not with any abruptness, but with a dreamy conviction that, for some reason unknown, he ought to be awake. He did not know how long he had slept, but when he looked at the fire he saw that the logs he had thrown on it had burnt themselves out. He had wakened, perhaps, he told himself, because a sensation of cold had warned his unconscious mind that he ought to be in bed. He grasped the arms of his chair and raised himself to his feet. He yawned, and as he opened his mouth, he heard the night-bell ring.

Whatever the message might be, he reminded him-

self luxuriously, he would not have to turn out for it. It was a good thing that his confident young successor should learn, on his very first night, what general practice meant. He would know a lot more about night-calls before a month was out!

Dr. Bradley moved stiffly towards the front door and unlocked it.

"Who's there? What is it?" he called.

There was apparently nobody there; but, a moment later, a small shape moved into the patch of light spread by the sitting-room window.

"It's me, sir," a child's voice said.

"And who may you be, my dear?"

"I'm Polly Hodgetts."

"A nice thing sending along a little girl like you in the middle of the night! Couldn't they send someone else?"

"No, it 'ad to be me," the child replied seriously, "because it's grandfather as is took bad, and my granny's got the bronchitis. I lives with them and looks after them, you see."

"Hodgetts? Hodgetts? Which Hodgetts?"

"It's old Lijah, doctor. You know him. He come down to the surgery to-night for a bottle of medicine; and now"—the message came out in a spate—"granny says as you've got to come over this instant, because he's woke up and 'is face is gone all of one side and her can't make him talk any sense and he keeps on crying."

Lijah Hodgetts . . . It sounded like a stroke, Dr. Bradley thought. The old man was seventy-five—the same age as himself: he had told him so that evening. Poor old chap! His first private patient in Sedgebury! Whether he had sold his practice or no, it would never do to send on the message to a stranger and let this old friend down. He said:

“All right, my dear, come in and sit down while I put my boots on.”

He returned to his chair, laid his slippers beside the hearth, and began to ease his feet into the boots he had taken off at tea-time. As he bent over, threading the obstinate laces, he knew that there was something at the back of his mind that he wanted to remember. Something to do, he felt sure, with the new young man, which had come to him while he slept.

At last! It came back. Of course: those blessed book-debts! He must remember to-morrow morning, to let young Harwood know he had made up his mind not to sell them. If he paid him a thousand pounds down instead of the beggarly hundred he offered he would not let them go. He wasn't going to have his old patients badgered by anyone!

“Come along then, my dear,” he said. “Why, it's starting to rain again. We shall want an umbrella. A good thing for you I've got one, isn't it, ha? Now the best thing you can do is to take my arm and keep close to me, see? You'll have to go slowly. I can't walk as fast as I could when I was your age.”

He chuckled to himself as he shut the door behind him and slid the latch-key into his overcoat-pocket. The rain drummed fiercely on the top of his opened umbrella. The little girl nestled close to his side and clung to his left arm as she had been bidden. They passed, that odd pair, across the rain-slashed oblong of light that the window cast. They moved slowly through it and on into the darkness of Crabb's Lane.

THE END

October, 1937—June, 1938.

